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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

February 2009

*A Prophet with a Difference*  
*Art for National Awakening ...*

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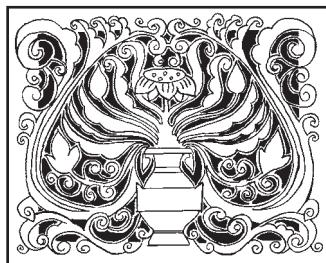


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**Vol. 114, No. 2**  
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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राय्य वराण्मिबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## Vedantic Harmony

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य एकोऽवर्णो बहुधा शक्तियोगाद् वर्णननेकान्निहितार्थो दधाति ।  
वि चैति चान्ते विश्वमादौ स देवः स नो बुद्ध्या शुभया संयुनक्तु ॥

May that Deity, the One, of inscrutable purpose, who though formless, brings into being many forms in the beginning, and into whom the world returns in the end—may he endow us with a noble intellect.

*(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 4.1)*

यं शैवाः समुपासते शिव इति ब्रह्मेति वेदान्तिनो  
बौद्धा बुद्ध इति प्रमाणपटवः कर्तेति नैयायिकाः ।  
अर्हन्नित्यथ जैनशासनरताः कर्मेति मीमांसकाः  
सोऽयं नो विदधातु वाञ्छितफलं त्रैलोक्यनाथो हरिः ॥

He who is worshipped as Shiva by the Shaivas, as Brahman by the Vedantins, as Buddha by the Buddhists, as the Agent by the Naiyayikas who are well-versed in the means of knowledge, as Arhat by the Jainas, as Karma by the Mimamsakas—may that Hari, the lord of the three worlds, grant us our desired ends.

स्वसिद्धान्तव्यवस्थासु द्वैतिनो निश्चिता दृढम् ।  
परस्परं विरुद्ध्यन्ते तैरयं न विरुद्ध्यते ॥

The dualists, confirmed believers in the methodologies establishing their own conclusions, are at loggerheads with one another. But this [non-dual] view has no conflict with them. *(Mandukya Karika, 3.17)*

विष्णुर्वा त्रिपुरान्तको भवतु वा ब्रह्मा सुरेन्द्रोऽथवा  
भानुर्वा शशलक्षणोऽथ भगवान् बुद्धोऽथ सिद्धोऽथवा ।  
रागद्वेषविषार्तिमोहरहितः सत्त्वानुकम्पोद्यतो  
यः सर्वैः सह संस्कृतो गुणगणैस्तस्मै नमः सर्वदा ॥

Whether the highest Being be Vishnu or Shiva, Brahma or Indra, the Sun or the Moon, Bhagavan Buddha or Mahavira the Perfect, I always offer my salutations to him who is free from the poison of attachment and hatred, worldliness and ignorance, who is moved by compassion for all creatures, and is possessed of all noble attributes.

# THIS MONTH

Fundamentalist thinking has been behind many recent wars, genocides, and acts of terrorism, deeply undermining liberal religious and secular values globally. The relation between **Vedanta and Secularism** may not be very obvious, but Swami Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta and its application are of singular importance in these troubled times.

Practical Vedanta based on a reinterpretation of Advaita, universality, acceptance, and principles over persons are some of the features that make **Swami Vivekananda: A Prophet with a Difference**. But Swami Purnatmananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar, argues that there is something more that makes the swami special.

Given their aphoristic nature, Swami Vivekananda's utterances on **The Advent of the Satya Yuga** remain an enigma. Swami Sunirmalananda of the Centro Ramakrishna Vedanta, Curitiba, explores the meaning of these statements to suggest why we may be part of an epoch-making process and how the challenges of our times may be harbingers of a better future.

Developmental concerns have undergone a paradigm shift over the last century, with intrinsic human values gaining prominence. Brahmachari Ajitachaitanya of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, examines the theoretical and practical dimensions of this movement **Towards Humanitarian Development** in the light of Swami Vivekananda's thought.

**Swami Vivekananda and Nikola Tesla: New Findings** is a presentation of some documents freshly brought to light by Sri Somenath

Mukherjee, Researcher, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata. The author begins his presentation with a review of Nikola Tesla's life and works.



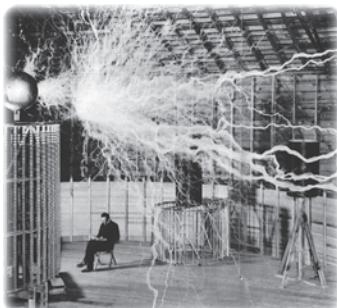
**A Famous Dinner** is the story of three Indians who were making a name for themselves in London when Swami Vivekananda was busy preaching Vedanta there in 1896. The author, Dr Hironmoy Mukherjee, is former Chief Controller of Explosives, Nagpur.

Dr Anil Baran Ray, Professor, Department of Political Science, Burdwan University, has had a long-standing research interest in Sister Nivedita's life and contributions. **Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening** is a fresh fruit of his endeavour.



The seventh instalment of Dr M Sivaramkrishna's study of **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta** takes him to texts exploring Sri Sarada Devi's role as a dialogician and providing fresh hermeneutical insights into Swami Vivekananda's doctrine of seva. The author is former Head, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

In the fifth instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra**, Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, continues his exposition of the aphorisms, now discussing the means for the attainment of bhakti.



## EDITORIAL

# Vedanta and Secularism

**I**N his seminal study *India as a Secular State*, Donald E Smith suggests the following definition of secularism: 'The secular state is a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion.' The Constitution of India as originally enacted did not use the term 'secular' to describe the new Indian republic. Justice P N Bhagawati suggests that 'perhaps the Constitution makers were apprehensive that if the words "secular" or "secularism" were introduced in the Constitution, they might unnecessarily bring in, by implication, the anti-religious overtone associated with the doctrine of secularism as it had developed in Christian countries. The Indian concept of secularism recognizes the relevance and validity of religion in life, but seeks to establish a rational synthesis between the legitimate functions of religion and the legitimate and expanding functions of the State' and 'this concept is clearly brought out in the various provisions of the Indian Constitution.'

Swami Vivekananda described India as a 'veritable ethnological museum'. That India—with its incredible religious, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity—still has a remarkable functional unity has been a source of surprise to many thinkers. Not that it is devoid of tensions on each of the above counts, sometimes severe enough to threaten its very integrity. The domains of the 'secular' and the 'religious' provide one such antithesis. But Indians have shown great resilience in absorbing stresses and evolving synthetic cultures and thought processes.

The Constitution of India has been seen as a product of the 'ideology of the Enlightenment'. It seeks to protect minority points of view and diverse

religious traditions. In so doing, it even compels 'traditional points of view to give up parts of their traditions in order to provide opportunities for previously disenfranchised people'. Interestingly, the Constitution does not define the categories 'secular' and 'religious'. But articles 25 and 26 clearly set limits on religious freedom in consonance with its secular outlook. Thus, though 'all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion', this freedom is 'subject to public order, morality, and health'.

In pursuit of its secular goals, the Constitution aims at the development of a uniform civil code applicable across religious categories. The Hindu Marriage Bill, Hindu Succession Bill, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Bill, and Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Bill passed by the Parliament, after intense initial opposition from Hindu groups, were major steps in this direction. But efforts to bring the Muslim community under the purview of a uniform civil code have proved futile. Thus polygamy is illegal for Hindus but legal for Muslims in India, the latter being covered by Islamic personal law.

The followers of most major religions consider their religious faiths to pervade all aspects of their lives. Hence secular aspirations often come in conflict with religious beliefs. The problem is compounded by the fact that though administrative institutions and the judiciary are supposed to be secular they are nevertheless peopled by men and women who may have deep personal religious convictions. How does one reconcile one's beliefs with secular responsibilities, especially in case of a conflict?

A secularism that ignores religion is bound to be dysfunctional in a society that is overwhelmingly religious. It is therefore important that we try to understand religion and religious diversity as undeniable

existential facts. Any such study would require a suitable framework. According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta provides such a framework. The term 'Vedanta' had traditionally been taken to mean a system of philosophy based on the Upanishads. But Swami Vivekananda saw a much deeper meaning in the term. He wrote to a disciple in May 1895:

Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary. This is the essential of religion: the Vedanta, applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India, is Hinduism. The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita, as applied in its Yoga-perception form, is Buddhism etc. Now by religion is meant the Vedanta; the applications must vary according to the different needs, surroundings, and other circumstances of different nations.

It would be wrong to interpret this statement in 'triumphalist' terms—to see Vedanta as some sort of 'super-religion'. In his lecture 'My Master' Swami Vivekananda stated:

I learnt from my Master ... the wonderful truth that the religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are but various phases of one eternal religion. That one eternal religion is applied to different planes of existence, is applied to the opinions of various minds and various races. ... One Infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways. Therefore we must respect all religions and we must try to accept them all as far as we can.

As Marie Louise Burke points out, a detailed study of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts shows that:

Never before Swamiji's time had the term [Vedanta] been given such universal significance as he gave it. Never before had it been broadened into a philosophy and religion which included every

faith of the world and every noble effort of man—reconciling spirituality and material advancement, faith and reason, science and mysticism, work and contemplation, service to man and absorption in God. Never before had it been conceived as the one universal religion, by accepting the principles of which the follower of any or no creed could continue along his own path and at the same time be able to identify himself with every other creed and aspect of religion.

Sri Ramakrishna's axiomatic statement of the truth underlying all religions—*yato mat tato path*; as many faiths, so many paths—continues to be poorly understood. Religious doctrines often appear hopelessly contradictory and religions seem to be dogmatic in their assertion of distinctive goals. Swami Vivekananda clarifies:

To learn this central secret that the Truth may be one and yet many at the same time, that we may have different visions of the same Truth from different standpoints, is exactly what must be done. Then, instead of antagonism to anyone, we shall have infinite sympathy with all. Knowing that as long as there are different natures born in this world, the same religious truth will require different adaptations, we shall understand that we are bound to have forbearance with each other. Just as nature is unity in variety—an infinite variation in the phenomenal—as in and through all these variations of the phenomenal runs the Infinite, the Unchangeable, the Absolute Unity, so it is with every man; the microcosm is but a miniature repetition of the macrocosm; in spite of all these variations, in and through them all runs this eternal harmony, and we have to recognise this. This idea, above all other ideas, I find to be the crying necessity of the day.

It is therefore important that we study and imbibe Vedanta as a means to understanding religious truths and phenomena. We shall thus not only broaden our own understanding of religion and deepen our spiritual lives, but also learn to have a sympathetic view of religious diversity. In so doing we would be able to discharge our secular duties without losing our religious moorings.

# ***Swami Vivekananda: A Prophet with a Difference***

## **Swami Purnatmananda**

It all began with a wonderful vision. One day Sri Ramakrishna was in a deeply ecstatic mood. His mind was soaring high in samadhi along an effulgent path. Transcending the stellar universe and entering the subtle realm of ideas, he found gods and goddesses in their ideal forms on both sides of the path. His mind gradually crossed the luminous barrier separating the region of relative existence from that of the Absolute. In that transcendental realm nothing physical was discernible. The very next moment he saw seven venerable rishis seated there in samadhi. It appeared to him that these sages had far surpassed in knowledge, purity, renunciation, and love not only men but even the gods. Lost in amazed reverence, he was reflecting on their greatness when he saw a portion of that undifferentiated effulgent sphere condense into the form of a divine child. The child came close to one of the rishis, lovingly stretched his two tender arms around the rishi's neck and addressed him in a sweet voice which dragged the mind of the sage down from the state of samadhi. The rishi opened his eyes and fixed his loving gaze upon the wonderful child. His face beamed with joy, showing that the child was very dear to his heart. The divine child said to him: 'I am going down. You must go with me.' The sage did not utter a word, but his affectionate look revealed his assent. As he kept looking at the child, he again became absorbed in samadhi. Then, to Sri Ramakrishna's amazement, a portion of the rishi's body and mind descended to earth in the form of a bright light. When he first saw Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna recognized him to be the rishi he saw in samadhi. He also indicated that the divine child of the vision was none other than himself.<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's account of the vision is too vivid to demand any explanation. An incarnation of the Divine, Sri Ramakrishna brought Swami Vivekananda down from the highest spiritual plane to fulfil his mission: to preach unto humans their divinity and to help them actualize that divinity, so that they can transcend their limited selves every moment of their lives and emerge finally as gods. It was indeed Sri Ramakrishna's aim to evolve gods out of material men and women by showing how to put the ideal of Vedanta into practice, a method later designated 'Practical Vedanta' by Swami Vivekananda.

### ***The Genesis of Practical Vedanta***

Swami Vivekananda's advent can be traced to the wonderful vision of Sri Ramakrishna mentioned above. Sri Ramakrishna's mission could also be traced to a unique utterance of his, the dissemination of which we owe to Swami Vivekananda's distinct genius. Sometime in 1884 Sri Ramakrishna was explaining to a group of devotees gathered in his room the essence of the Vaishnava doctrine. Love for chanting god's name, compassion for all beings, and service to devotees, he pointed out, constitute the three salient instructions that all Vaishnavas must follow. As he started explaining 'compassion for all beings', he went into samadhi. A little later, when he came down to a semi-ecstatic state, he said: 'Compassion for all beings? How foolish to speak of compassion! Human beings are as insignificant as worms crawling on the earth—and they are to show compassion to others? That's absurd. It must not be compassion, but service to all. Recognize all as manifestations of God and serve them as such' (852).

Everybody present heard Sri Ramakrishna's words. But none except Narendra could comprehend their true import. After leaving the room he said to some of his friends:

What a wonderful light I saw today in those words of the Master! How beautifully did he reconcile the simple, sweet, and refreshing ideal of devotion with the knowledge of Vedanta, which people believe to be dry, difficult, and heartless! For so long we've heard that anyone who wants to attain non-dual knowledge must retire to the forest, shunning family and friends completely and forcibly uprooting love, devotion, and other sweet sentiments from the heart, driving them away forever. ... But what the Master said today in his ecstatic mood is clear: One can bring Vedanta from the forest to the home and practise it in daily life. Let people continue with whatever they are doing; there's no harm in this. People must first believe and understand that God has manifested Himself before them as the world and its creatures. Whomever people come in contact with in every moment of their lives, whomever they treat with love, respect, and compassion—they all are parts of God, God Himself. If people consider every human being to be God, how can they consider themselves to be superior to others and harbour anger, hatred, and arrogance—or even compassion—towards them? (ibid).

From this insight of Narendranath emerged two remarkable methods of spiritualizing work and service, later implemented through the Ramakrishna Mission that he founded. These two methods are: serving humans by looking upon them as the veritable manifestations of God and performing work in the spirit of worship. These form the very cornerstone of Swami Vivekananda's concept of Practical Vedanta. As ideas these were not new, but the presentation and application was new, something that had never been attempted by any saint or prophet. The ideas were there in the Upanishads, Bhagavad-gita, and the epics and Puranas of India. Service has also been an important component in Semitic religions. But there was a difference. In fact, the only sage who is remembered for acquainting the

world with a similar ideal and method of work is Buddha. But although Buddha's approach was remarkable, the absence of God in his entire scheme tended to make it more a secular philanthropic philosophy than a spiritual concept and phenomenon. The disciples of Buddha served humans with great sincerity and feeling, but they served only the afflicted—people torn by misery and distress. They never served God in them. On the other hand, when the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna—fired with the spirit of service advocated by the Master and interpreted by Swami Vivekananda—served humans, they served their God or their Chosen Deity in them. Sister Nivedita recorded the story of 'one disciple, who, in the early days of the Order, was so filled with the impulse of this reverence that he sucked the sores of the lepers to bring them ease'. This was the attitude and spirit that differentiated the philanthropic religion of Buddha from the spiritual religion of Ramakrishna. This was a new phenomenon in the realm of religion and spirituality.

From this follows, as a corollary, another of Swami Vivekananda's contributions to religion and spirituality in modern times: there is nothing secular, all work is spiritual; and this in a sense very distinct from the concept of theocracy. Sister Nivedita comments on this in her introduction to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*:

It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's [Swami Vivekananda's] life, for here he becomes the meeting-point, not only of East and West, but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realisation. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. ...

This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnāna and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or

the door of the temple. To him, there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

### Reinterpreting Advaita

Thus Swami Vivekananda taught us how to equate work with worship, service to man with service to God, and all experiences of life—however small or trivial—with spiritual experiences of the highest importance. These ideas also led him to a unique interpretation of the philosophy of Advaita or non-dualism. It had its origin in the moving reprimand he received from his Master in response to his entreaty for *nirvikalpa samadhi* during the last days of the Master. Sri Ramakrishna had said: 'Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation. There is a state higher than that. It is you who sing, "O Lord, Thou art all that exists".'<sup>3</sup> *Nirvikalpa samadhi*, the highest Advaitic realization, has always been cherished by Indian sages and seers as the ultimate spiritual attainment. But here was a teacher who was taking an entirely different stand, who was providing a new orientation to Hindu monasticism by including human and social commitment as a mandatory ideal. Sri Ramakrishna never denied God's place in a monk's spiritual sadhana, he only exchanged the position of God for that of the human being. To him the human being was none other than the Divine.

Three or four days before he left his mortal body, Sri Ramakrishna transmitted the full wealth of his spiritual realization to Narendra, and then told him: 'Today I have given you my all and am now only a poor fakir, possessing nothing. By this power you will do immense good in the world and not until it is accomplished will you return [to your own absolute Self].'<sup>4</sup> In 1897, when Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission, he placed before his brother monks and disciples the twin ideal to be followed by the monastics of the

Ramakrishna Order: *Atmano mokshartham jagad hitaya cha*, for one's own liberation and for the welfare of the world. This was the legacy he inherited from his Master. Thus was added a new dimension to traditional Hindu monasticism.

This addition notwithstanding, Swami Vivekananda never deviated from the fundamentals of Hindu monasticism. Rather, while strictly adhering to these monastic principles, he brought monasticism closer to its basic aims and objectives and made it more humane in its application.

### Principle over Person

Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples not to make his person prominent. Being the chief of the disciples, Swami Vivekananda took upon himself the hard task of remaining true to the Master's precept. He was more for the propagation of his Master's ideas and cared less to project him as a person. He was very particular about this. There arose much misunderstanding between him and some of his brother disciples over this issue. Those brother disciples who differed were of the opinion that he was not giving due importance to the Master and his uniqueness. He in turn tried to convince them that he was doing so only in accordance with the Master's wish and command, and that he was trying to preach his precepts in preference to his person. Personally he was convinced that as a person the Master was infinitely greater than what even his disciples were capable of conceiving him to be. The originality, catholicity, and profundity of Sri Ramakrishna's ideas were remarkable. Swami Vivekananda was, therefore, all for presenting those ideas to humanity at large and was least bothered whether the Master as a person was highlighted or not. In his letter of 12 January 1895 to Alasinga Perumal, he wrote: 'The disciples of all the prophets have always inextricably mixed up the ideas of the Master with the person, and at last killed the ideas for the person. The disciples of Shri Ramakrishna must guard against doing the same thing. Work for the idea, not the person.'<sup>5</sup>

Swami Vivekananda was keen that the Master's grand ideals be held high above all other things, in spite of criticism and denouncement. He wrote to Alasinga: 'I have a message to give, let me give it to the people who appreciate it and who will work it out. What care I who takes it? "He who doeth the will of my Father" is my own' (ibid.). Swami Vivekananda's entire life was a burning illustration of the message he received from his Master. He was satisfied to be the 'voice', the 'form' being his Master's.

### ***Universality and Oneness***

Vivekananda's was a universal mind. Narrowness, sectarianism, bigotry, and parochialism he hated from the core of his heart, trained as he was by a Master who symbolized in his own person the very spirit of universality. His great message of harmony of religions, rather of universal harmony, expressed in his profound pronouncement 'as many faiths, so many paths', is looked upon today as the panacea for the evils threatening the very existence of human civilization. Swami Vivekananda's addresses at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, as well as the corpus of his other lectures, letters, and conversations are replete with universal ideas. His words at the concluding session of the Parliament of Religions reflect his universal mind and universal vision:

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, 'Brother, yours is an impossible hope.' Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda dreamt of a universal religion which 'will have no location in place or time; ... whose sun will shine ... on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being' (1.19).

He carried with him this message of unity and universality wherever he went. Whosoever came in contact with him was impressed by the catholicity of his message. His famous letter of 10 June 1898, from Almora, to Mohammed Sarfaraz Husain is worth quoting in this context: 'We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.'<sup>7</sup>

Has any system ever preached this oneness? Swami Vivekananda's answer was 'yes'. Advaita, the creed of non-dualism, of oneness, has existed in India for millennia. He dreamt of establishing a centre in the Himalayas that would implement in its everyday activities the philosophy of Advaita as realized and actualized in the lives of Indian sages and seers down the ages, including Sri Ramakrishna in recent times. This dream of his was materialized by his disciples a few years before he passed away. The Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, situated at 6,400 feet above sea level, in the fascinating solitude of a Himalayan jungle and commanding a magnificent view of snow-covered peaks extending across nearly 400 kilometres, was set up in response to the swami's vision. The grand view and elevating ambience help one's mind soar naturally into contempla-

tion of the Infinite, and ultimately to the realization of Advaita. Swami Vivekananda believed that 'in the future all religions would receive a new orientation from the non-dualistic doctrine and spread goodwill among men'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Not Tolerance, but Acceptance**

Swami Vivekananda called notice to two key words which summarized the Indian ethos developed over the ages: 'tolerance' and 'acceptance'. To him, however, 'tolerance' was not a happy word for expressing true universality, which, with him, was not merely a concept but a realization. That is why he said that we believe not only in tolerance but in universal acceptance. That should be our watchword. 'Tolerance' connotes an attitude of superiority, of compassionate licence and merciful exclusion. To Swami Vivekananda 'tolerance' was sometimes an insult and often a blasphemy. Everyone was a fellow traveller and a fellow soldier sharing equal rights and responsibilities on the journey to Truth. This positive idea in its totality is present in the word 'acceptance'. He therefore said:

I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him. I shall go to the mosque of the Mohammedan; I shall enter the Christian's Church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of everyone.

Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still a continuous revelation going on? It is a marvellous book—these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all

the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future!<sup>9</sup>

This indeed is India's dream and also its realization since Vedic times. Millennia ago the Rig Veda proclaimed: 'Truth is one, sages describe it variously'. This realization is the unique and original wealth of 'Eternal India'. On the strength of it the Indian seers sought to turn the world into a single family, a single home: '*yatra vishvam bhavati eka nidam*'. The message needed to be disseminated to the world at large and it was reserved for Swami Vivekananda to take up this task.

Two more visions are of great symbolic significance in this context. It was probably sometime in April 1893, when Swami Vivekananda was still unsure whether he should travel to the West, that he had a dream in which he saw Sri Ramakrishna walking over the waters of the ocean, beckoning him to follow. He first took the dream as the command of the Master to undertake the journey to the US and participate in the Parliament of Religions. But on second thought he felt it necessary to have Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's consent and approval. To this effect he wrote a letter to her. Interestingly, she too had had a similar dream and was convinced that it was the Master's will that Narendra should go to the West to deliver India's message. Even earlier—some time after the Master's passing—she had had a vision in which she had seen Sri Ramakrishna's form enter that of Narendra, signifying that the Master would henceforth work through his chief disciple. So she now had little hesitation in conveying her blessings for the journey.<sup>10</sup>

Another of Holy Mother's visions is even more fascinating. It was a full-moon night sometime in the month of June or July 1893. Mother was sitting on one of the stairs of the bathing ghat on the Ganga at Nilambar Mukherji's garden house at Belur. Suddenly she saw Sri Ramakrishna emerge from behind and rush down by her into the Ganga. His body instantly dissolved in the sacred waters of the river. Mother was watching this spectacle in great surprise when all of a sudden she saw Swami

Vivekananda emerging from nowhere, rushing to the river, and sprinkling handfuls of the holy waters over a large multitude assembled on the bank of the Ganga while shouting: 'Glory unto Ramakrishna!' Mother also saw countless people attaining liberation at the touch of those waters.<sup>11</sup>

### The Gift of Vedanta

A link can be found, both in content and significance, between these four visions: Sri Ramakrishna's vision regarding Swami Vivekananda's advent, the dreams of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi regarding Sri Ramakrishna's plans about Swami Vivekananda's visit to the West, and Holy Mother's vision regarding Swami Vivekananda's role in fulfilling Sri Ramakrishna's global mission of propagating the message of unity underlying all religions, of human unity, and of human divinity.

In her book *The Gift Unopened*, Eleanor Stark has discussed the impact of Swami Vivekananda's historic appearance at the Chicago Parliament of Religions and its contemporary significance for the West. She says that Vivekananda gave to the West the wonderful gift of Vedanta, of Advaita Vedanta, with its message of human divinity and the oneness of humanity and of human 'religion'. America and the West are yet to appreciate the magnitude and significance of this gift. It still remains unopened as it were. She says that Columbus discovered the soil of America, but the soul of America—its thirst for liberty, fraternity, unity, and universality, as dreamt of by its founding fathers—remained undiscovered till Swami Vivekananda appeared at the Parliament of Religions and delivered his message of human excellence. This excellence is the essential human nature. To manifest this excellence is the goal of religion, the goal of the human being, and the goal of civilization.

The message of Sri Ramakrishna is nothing but the message of Vedanta. His life is a living illustration of Vedanta. And it was for Swami Vivekananda to discover its real meaning and interpret it properly in the contemporary context, and implement it correctly and adequately in accordance

with contemporary needs. Sri Sarada Devi's visions, particularly the second, remind us that Swami Vivekananda is a global prophet. Vedanta needed to be proclaimed to all corners of the world, and who could be better suited to accomplish this task than Swami Vivekananda? It was for this purpose that Sri Ramakrishna brought him down from the highest spiritual regions: to offer humanity the message of human excellence, the essence of Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'<sup>12</sup> Swami Vivekananda was himself the embodiment of human excellence in its totality, a Columbus in religious history, the discoverer of a new spiritual realm. That is what makes him a prophet with a difference. 

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# The Advent of the Satya Yuga

Swami Sunirmalananda

SOCIAL life in our times is beset with a host of evils—the *adhibhautika* problems. Violence, blackmail, fraud, threats, untruth, and insults have all become a part of everyday life. There are also divisions and hierarchies: the high and the low, the touchable and the untouchable, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. Today's life is full of fear. There was a time in India when people in general were not known to indulge in falsehood or swindling and were committed to non-injury, come what may. Honesty could at times mean loss of family and property, yet people had the courage to stick to truth. And such people were from the ordinary run. Who, after all, was Sri Ramakrishna's father, Kshudiram? A simple and pious soul who refused to bear false witness and in consequence lost everything, but never budged from truth. Things seem to be different now. We are reminded that the Kali Yuga, 'Iron Age', is now with us—strong and stubborn. The horrors of our age are the horrors of the Kali Yuga, and they appear to be ever on the increase. Goodness appears to have lost its value.

The *adhibdaivika* problems, natural calamities and mass atrocities, are also an integral part of our lives. These were there earlier too, but when they become 'everyday news' our hearts become inured to them. We are hardly affected by the news of tens of thousands of people suffering and dying of disease, starvation, and violence in Africa or in the wake of earthquakes, tsunamis, and hurricanes—whether they be in Myanmar, China, the US, or India. And the horrors of war are perpetually with us. A human torturing other human beings is no news anymore. Human bombs are commonplace. Terrorism is an everyday word now.

That our wants are increasing at a faster rate than ever adds to the problem. We live in an inter-

connected world. If just one basic element in the global economic balance gets out of control—the price of crude oil, for instance—all other elements suffer. Nothing remains the same anymore. This makes our lives—running as we are at terrific speed—precarious.

Then there are the *adhyatmika* issues—problems created by ourselves. Psychiatrists complain that the numbers of their patients are ever on the increase. The army of psychiatrists, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, and counsellors of various types is finding itself woefully inadequate in treating the multitudes suffering from depression, anxiety, panic disorders, and related problems. Unhealthy habits are also ubiquitous, and so are their after-effects.

Where are we heading? We have been told that the Kali Yuga gives way to the Satya Yuga, the 'Age of Truth' or the 'Golden Age'. But to tell ourselves that all is well until a storm or a bomb hits our own house is to be simplistic. Our situation is clearly not good. So, can we reasonably hope for the Golden Age?

In the letters he wrote to his brother disciples Swamis Brahmananda and Ramakrishnananda from the US, Swami Vivekananda stated that Sri Ramakrishna has ushered in the Golden Age with his advent: 'From the day Shri Ramakrishna was born dates the growth of modern India and of the Golden Age. And you are the agents to bring about this Golden Age.'

But how do we reconcile this ideal of the Satya Yuga with the reality of our lives? With conflicts, suffering, and wars all around, how does one say that the Golden Age has arrived, or, is at least knocking?

## What Is the Satya Yuga?

Satya Yuga or Golden Age, to our imagination, is Utopia—only rights and no duties, only gain and

no losses, happiness and no sorrow, perfection and no blemish, health and no disease, life and no death, knowledge and no ignorance, beauty and no ugliness. So when we read Swami Vivekananda saying that the Satya Yuga has started with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, we are left incredulous. To all appearances, what we have now is just the opposite, dystopia. The real 'Golden Age' seems to have a different connotation.

So what is 'Satya Yuga'? Can this *karma-bhumi*, the field of action and reaction that is our world, ever be a Utopia? Swami Vivekananda himself defined 'Satya Yuga' in his letter to his disciple Alasinga Perumal: 'I believe that the Satya Yuga (Golden Age) will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace and harmony. This idea of Satya Yuga is what would revivify India. Believe it' (5.31). If the above statement appears exhortatory, we have an even more categorical statement in another of his letters, written to Swami Ramakrishnananda: 'From the very date that he [Sri Ramakrishna] was born, has sprung the Satya-Yuga (Golden Age). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandāla will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past. That fight about distinctions that there was, belonged to another era. In this Satya-Yuga the tidal wave of Shri Ramakrishna's Love has unified all' (6.335).

It is important that we note the word 'henceforth' in the above passage. The following statement by Swami Vivekananda at the 1893 Parliament of Religions makes a comparable point: 'Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension".' Swamiji is not indicating the attainment of a goal; but he is definitely suggesting the beginning of a process.

One day Sri Ramakrishna, who was born into a

brahmana family, cleaned the drain in the house of the sweeper of the Dakshineswar temple and wiped it dry with his own hair. As he did so he prayed to the Divine Mother that the feeling of caste superiority be erased from his heart. This was a symbolic act. If it had a deep personal meaning for Sri Ramakrishna, it also had an archetypal significance for the whole of humanity. In the hundred and fifty odd years since that act great strides have been taken in mitigating caste distinctions. This is a significant move towards an egalitarian society, though the Satya Yuga ideal of 'one caste' would still appear to us a distant dream.

The concept of varna or caste is linked to the Creation myth—and thus also to the concept of 'yuga'—in the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata, and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*. Swami Vivekananda also refers to caste in relation to the Satya Yuga. Caste, of course, is a fundamental social concept that has been badly misrepresented and misappropriated down the ages. Varna and privilege ought never to have been confused, but the confusion has taken place.

According to the Bhagavata, in the Golden Age there was only one caste known as Hamsa. That age was also called Krita because all beings were then naturally self-fulfilled and perfect.<sup>2</sup> According to the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 'In the beginning this (the kshatriya and other castes) was indeed Brahman (Viraj in the form of Fire, which was a brahmana).'<sup>3</sup> This, of course, is an idealized situation: a person might have been a supplier of goods or a labourer, but intellectually and at heart he was no different from a brahmana, and vice versa. Divisions, based on individual traits and on work, came later. And such a division, based on work, is so natural that it exists even today in all societies—whether in the East or the West. Division of labour is inevitable in any large society, as are social groups based on such divisions; and everyone seems to understand and accept this. But when privilege and work are confused, the system turns into a problem.

### ***The Ideal Human Being***

In his address on 'The Mission of the Vedanta',

Swami Vivekananda said:

Our ideal of high birth, therefore, is different from that of others. Our ideal is the Brahmin of spiritual culture and renunciation. By the Brahmin ideal what do I mean? I mean the ideal Brahmin-ness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race. ... If a country is altogether inhabited by such Brahmins, by men and women who are spiritual and moral and good, is it strange to think of that country as being above and beyond all law? What police, what military are necessary to govern them? Why should any one govern them at all? Why should they live under a government? They are good and noble, and they are the men of God; these are our ideal Brahmins, and we read that in the Satya Yuga there was only one caste, and that was the Brahmin. We read in the Mahābhārata that the whole world was in the beginning peopled with Brahmins, and that as they began to degenerate, they became divided into different castes, and that when the cycle turns round, they will all go back to that Brahminical origin. *This cycle is turning round now, and I draw your attention to this fact.* [emphasis added] ... The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin. This Vedantic idea is applicable not only here but over the whole world. Such is our ideal of caste as meant for raising all humanity slowly and gently towards the realisation of that great ideal of the spiritual man who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure, and meditative. In that ideal there is God.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have an excellent summary of the concept of the Golden Age: ideal brahmana-hood is the goal that all humans in society ought to strive for, and this is also the ideal of the Satya Yuga.

If the ideal brahmana was a living reality in the Golden Age, then why did divisions become necessary subsequently? According to Swami Vivekananda, 'The only explanation is to be found in the Mahābhārata, which says that in the beginning of the Satya Yuga there was one caste, the Brahmins, and then by difference of occupations they went on dividing themselves into different castes, and

that is the only true and rational explanation that has been given. And in the coming Satya Yuga all the other castes will have to go back to the same condition' (3. 293).

It may appear puzzling how becoming brahmanas could possibly solve our present-day problems. Swami Vivekananda has explained the word 'brahmana'. Is it possible then to live such a life? We mentioned Sri Ramakrishna's father. There have been many others like him—simple householders living great lives. Such people continue to live in every society, and it is they who hold society together. Sri Ramakrishna himself exemplified to perfection the ideal brahmana of the future. Swami Vivekananda pointed to him as the ideal of the future, the ideal of the Satya Yuga: living and working without attachment, absolutely dedicated to the Divine, free from all distinctions of caste and race, free from base desires and pride, and ever concerned for the welfare of others.

By showing that such a life is possible, even under trying circumstances, Sri Ramakrishna has opened to one and all the doors to the attainment of the brahmana ideal. All have equal right to know the Truth. As a corollary, the ideal of the Satya Yuga could also be viewed subjectively: while the whole world is in the Kali Yuga, as it was during Sri Ramakrishna's time, an individual can be in the Satya Yuga by manifesting the qualities of an ideal brahmana. So whether or not the Satya Yuga of our conception has actually arrived, we can still create it for ourselves. If we change, the world will change for us.

It may be asked: Caste is particular to India. So how can the brahmana-hood ideal be of relevance to other societies? We have already noted that social divisions are universal. Personality traits are also no respecters of geographical boundaries. If the ideal of brahmana-hood reduces the ills of Indian society, it would do the same in other countries too.

### **Why Don't We See It?**

If the Satya Yuga has actually begun with Sri Ramakrishna's advent, why do we not see any signs of it? In fact we seem to have much evidence to the

contrary in the numerous negative elements in our society. Goodness, nobility, and generosity seem to be at a premium, and today's society hardly seems to value them.

We have already drawn attention to Swami Vivekananda's use of the term 'henceforth', which suggests that Satya Yuga as a process has only begun. Over the last century we have indeed had some remarkable changes in society. Human life expectancy as well as the physical and material quality of life have improved significantly. Knowledge is now open for all to access. This is a fundamental step towards a higher evolution of society. Genuine spirituality, as distinct from creedal religion, is also gaining ground. The flame of Eastern spirituality is now lighting up the entire globe. Words like 'yoga' and 'karma' are now familiar conversational terms. The ideal of karma yoga is not only transforming individual lives but is also helping in the betterment of society as a whole. God has become 'nearer to the heart' now.

India has witnessed a significant reduction in caste-based discrimination. If Indian society is to further mitigate the caste problem, as well as the problem of inter-religious conflict, there needs to be a significant improvement in its political climate. Genuine social democracy, public accountability, and effective delivery of justice are crying needs of the hour in Indian society.

Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and their disciples and followers have been working silently to erase divisive caste distinctions. Sri Sarada Devi's ministrations to and interactions with people from all sections of society, despite the severe handicaps of orthodoxy—she had to once pay a fine because a non-brahmana boy had served food to brahmana guests in her house—remain a beacon light in this matter. So, Satya Yuga is an ideal to be brought into being in our lives. That is the reason why Swami Vivekananda said, 'This idea of Satya Yuga is what would revivify India.' The process has begun, and it is for us to transform our lives.

While other reformers of his time blamed religion for all of India's problems, especially that of

caste, Swami Vivekananda was the first and probably only person to clearly point out that religion was not at fault. According to him, lack of education was the problem: 'One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else' (7.501). And he was quick to remind us that there were no easy solutions to the problem: 'Who will give the world light? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law, it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity' (ibid.). The 'bravest and best' of the earth, who work incessantly for others, are indeed brahmanas. These brahmanas who are knowingly or unknowingly responding to Swami Vivekananda's call will create a new India. And a rejuvenated India is essential to the supply of spiritual leaven to the globe, as Swamiji himself had pointed out.

The doors of heaven are open to all; it is for us to enter. Same is the case with the Satya Yuga. Hence Swamiji says: 'You are the agents to bring about this Golden Age. To work, with this conviction of heart!' (6.318). 'Work' here signifies bringing education to the masses. Swamiji warned against caste-conflict: 'I must again draw your attention to the fact that cursing and vilifying and abusing do not and cannot produce anything good. They have been tried for years and years, and no valuable result has been obtained. Good results can be produced only through love, through sympathy' (3.198).

### ***Satya Yuga and Sri Ramakrishna***

At a time when personalities seem to be losing their relevance, what is Sri Ramakrishna's role in bringing about the monumental changes in society that ushering in the Satya Yuga entails? A powerful person can influence a community over a period of time, but only avatars have had a lasting impact on the course of history. Few individuals have been able to alter the direction of life in society at large. Only an avatara can wield such influence. How does he do that? The acts of the avatara are often symbolic. Sri Ramakrishna's throwing some coins mixed with mud

into the Ganga, saying, 'Money is clay; clay, money', hardly appears to be a noteworthy act in itself. But it has been a powerful symbol of detachment that has awakened the spiritual consciousness of innumerable people. This is precisely how Sri Ramakrishna accomplished his work—sitting in a small room and changing the world through a change in consciousness, by awakening the kundalini of the world. By positing love of God and God-realization as the ideals of humankind, he gave a powerful stimulus for transforming the Kali Yuga into the Satya Yuga. Earlier reformers had also tried to do something about the problem of caste. If they did not achieve significant success, it was due to either their inability to understand the source of the problem or their lack of power to bring about a global change.

Not every human problem can be directly linked to human behaviour. Natural disasters are a case in point. Is the concept of 'Satya Yuga' relevant to these? The current ecological crisis caused by global warming has busted the myth that humans can neither alter nature decisively for the worse nor have a hand in natural calamities. It has shown powerfully that thoughtless action has grave physical consequences. The theory of karma, however, tells us that we are interdependent and linked to the cosmos in much more subtle and intricate ways, and our actions have both gross and subtle physical and moral effects. Our work can be attuned to *rita* or the 'cosmic order' in three different ways: (i) we can consciously do good to mitigate the effect of ill acts; (ii) at a higher level we may act in a spirit of detachment or karma yoga, which is an unfailing source of individual and collective good; and (iii) our work may be influenced by divine intervention, widely termed 'grace'. Grace can remove the ill-effects of karma. Sri Ramakrishna, in some of his conversations with his devotees, stressed this aspect of grace, saying, 'Much of it [the effects of karma] is cancelled by the power of God's name.'<sup>5</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's worship of Mother Kali assumes a special significance in this respect. In her apparently terrible form, she is the symbol of divine grace mitigating human karma. Her iconography may be interpreted in this way: Kali stands

on Kala—Time or Death. So, to the devotee, Kali is the bestower of immortality. The devotee has taken birth many times over, and all these lives are symbolically represented in the garland of severed heads that Kali wears. The blood on her tongue represents the karma of the worshipper, which she 'devours', as it were, through her grace. Her girdle of cut hands is another symbol of freeing the devotees from the propensity towards evil, since it is generally the hand that creates new karma. Though she has herself turned blue by drinking the blood of bad karma, the compassionate Kali bestows grace constantly, thus liberating human souls. This image has been introduced with tremendous force into the psyche of the world by Sri Ramakrishna in order to awaken the dormant spiritual consciousness, the collective kundalini.

The domain of grace, of course, transcends all rational categories, and opens up unending possibilities. Let me leave you with this enigmatic conversation:

Girish: 'The Malaya breeze, I believe, turns all trees into sandal-wood.'

Master: 'Not unless there is substance in them. There are a few trees, the cotton-tree for instance, which are not turned into sandal-wood.'

Girish: 'I don't care.'

Master: 'But this is the law.'

Girish: 'But everything about you is illegal.' ...

Master: 'Yes, that may be true. When the river of bhakti overflows, the land all around is flooded with water to the depth of a pole' (957). 

## References

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2. *Bhagavata*, 11.17.10.
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# **Towards Humanitarian Development**

**Brahmachari Ajitachaitanya**

THE relevance of Swami Vivekananda's economic thoughts in the context of today's India can hardly be overestimated. Though not an economist in the literal sense of the term, Swamiji has given us some of the most thought-provoking economic ideas, which were the result of his pragmatic analysis of ground reality. Rooted in that reality, and not in mere theory, his thoughts with regard to two basic problems of the present Indian economy—poverty and unemployment—continue to grow in relevance. Consequently, a comprehensive study of Swamiji's economic ideas against the backdrop of some contemporary economic theories may be profitable. The present article proposes to analyse the far-reaching implications of Swamiji's thought with a mind to contribute to the design of a blueprint for India's economic development.

The schema adopted in this study is based on substantive freedom as criterion for judging development. Economic development cannot merely be interpreted in terms of increase in commodities or volume of services. Rather, importance should be given to the effects that these have on people's actual opportunities and rights. The role of public action in eliminating deprivation and expanding human freedom in India needs to be prioritized. The proposition is, therefore, to adopt an essentially 'people-centred' approach that places human agency at centre stage. The crucial role of social opportunities lies in expanding this realm of human agency and freedom, in particular those opportunities that are strongly influenced by social circumstances and public policies—education, health, nutrition, social equality, civil liberties, and other basic determinants of the quality of life.

## ***Basis of Swami Vivekananda's Economic Thought***

Swami Vivekananda was not a specialist economist, but he understood well the roots of India's economic problems. Once he spoke on a purely economic subject, 'The Use of Silver in India', and participated in a debate on 'Bimetallism' at the annual convention of the American Social Science Association on 6 September 1893. According to a report published the next day in the *Daily Saratogian*, 'Money was the subject' and 'addresses and papers all pertained to finance'.<sup>1</sup> This incident suggests that Swamiji possessed a general knowledge about economics, otherwise he would not have considered it prudent to speak before a knowledgeable assembly.

Unlike other thinkers Swamiji had a first-hand experience of India's economic problems, as he had traversed through the length and breadth of the country on foot. And while travelling he had come in close contact with farmers, artisans, traders, tribals, and people from other walks of life, sharing with them—irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, and gender—their privation, hunger, and misery, and learning about the reasons for these. He also came across the emerging proletariat working under pitiable conditions in factories and workshops. He was tormented to see the oppression common people were suffering at the hands of upper-class elites, zamindars, priests, and the imperialist foreign rulers—and his mind brooded over the solutions that would improve the lot of the common masses.

Swamiji later remarked, 'I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth'.<sup>2</sup> The power of his thoughts, which touches us even today, was based on his intense personal feelings: 'May I be born again and again, and suf-

fer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship' (5.137). Swamiji's prime concern was 'Man', and for any human being to manifest his or her inner potential the development of 'self-esteem' is the very first step. The lack of self-esteem in India Swamiji called 'lost individuality', and he was convinced that India as a nation must come out from its economic stagnation to recover that lost individuality. Hence his emphasis on overall economic development as a means to freedom from poverty and backwardness.

### ***Humanitarian Development***

The concept of material development, at present, is slowly giving way to the humanitarian development paradigm, which gives greater priority to human welfare. This concept has a sharp resemblance to the solutions Swami Vivekananda conceived more than a century ago. Let us briefly review the major concepts of development discussed over the last three decades and analyse how Swamiji's ideas corroborate those views.

***Basic-Needs Approach*** · There are certain basic human needs related to the preservation of life, like food, clothing, shelter, health, and protection. The provision of these basic needs came to be known in the 1970s as the 'basic-needs approach'. The rationale of this approach was that the direct provision of such basic goods and services would fight absolute poverty faster than other alternative strategies attempting growth acceleration or rise in poor people's income. This concept was adopted by the World Bank.<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda too wanted the poor to be provided with the basic amenities that would relieve their painful struggle for survival. He said, 'First of all, you must remove this evil of hunger and starvation, this constant anxiety of bare existence.'<sup>4</sup> He was exhorting his followers to provide these basic needs when he said, 'Go, all of you, wherever

there is an outbreak of plague or famine, or wherever the people are in distress, and mitigate their sufferings' (5.383).

***Dudley Seers's View*** · Dudley Seers pressed the basic question about the meaning of development when he asserted:

The questions to ask about country's development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capita income doubled.<sup>5</sup>

This assertion was neither an idle speculation nor the description of a hypothetical situation. A number of developing countries experienced relatively high growth of per capita income during the 1960s and 70s, but showed little or no general improvement. According to the earlier growth definition these countries were developing, but the newer criteria showed they were actually not.

Dudley Seers's notion of development takes into account three important factors: poverty, unemployment, and inequality. He defines development to mean the reduction of these three in order to improve the living condition of the masses. This theory has a striking similarity with Swamiji's insistence on an integral improvement in the 'condition of the masses', which he considered vital for India's development.<sup>6</sup> More precisely: 'We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and *raise the masses*' (6.255). To 'raise the masses' means to improve the living conditions of the common people by reducing poverty, unemployment, and inequality. In fact, Swamiji devoted his whole life to this very cause—the upliftment of the masses.

***Goulet's Three Core Values*** · Denis Goulet identifies three basic components or core values, which would serve as a conceptual basis and as practical guidelines for understanding the inner

meaning of development. These are: life-sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. Life-sustenance is concerned with the provision of basic needs, which has already been discussed. A major objective of development must be to provide the poor with the basic needs that help them come out of acute poverty.<sup>7</sup> As has been stated earlier, Swamiji spoke in the same vein and with almost the same terminology.

A second universal component of the good life is self-esteem—a sense of worth and self-respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own needs. Developing countries seek development of self-esteem to eradicate the feeling of dominance and dependence that is associated with inferior economic status.<sup>8</sup> According to Goulet, 'Development is legitimized as a goal because it is an important, perhaps an indispensable way of gaining esteem.'<sup>9</sup> In this context it is worth mentioning that Swami Vivekananda also considered economic prosperity as one criterion for attaining self-esteem at individual and national levels. In fact, his perception is deeper and wider. He considered both economic and non-economic factors necessary for the attainment of self-esteem. He remarks, 'My ideal is growth, expansion, development on national ideals'.<sup>10</sup>

All people and societies seek some basic form of self-esteem, although its nature and form may vary. However, with the proliferation of modern values that originated in developed nations, many societies in developing countries possessing a profound sense of their own worth based on different values, suffer from serious cultural confusion when they come in contact with economically and technologically advanced societies.<sup>11</sup> Swamiji expressed the same with a touch of pathos: 'When I see Indians dressed in European apparel and costumes, the thought comes to my mind, perhaps they feel ashamed to own their nationality and kinship with the illiterate, ignorant, poor, downtrodden people of India!'<sup>12</sup>

Todaro also considers that 'wholesale imitation' of lifestyle, attitudes, institutions, norms, and values are not conducive to the overall development of any nation. It is remarkable that Swamiji re-

minded us of this point more than a hundred years ago in his essay 'Modern India', where he suggested that the tendency for 'imitation of others' implies a loss of self-respect and is a sure way to national degradation.

The third core value to judge development is, according to Goulet, freedom. Freedom means emancipation from alienating material conditions of life and from social servitude to nature, ignorance, other people, misery, institutions, and dogmatic beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Swamiji considered freedom as the first condition of growth<sup>14</sup> and asserted that 'liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down'.<sup>15</sup> He viewed the concept of 'achievement of freedom' from two aspects. First he wanted the individual to have freedom, and with it to develop and rise. According to him it is the natural right of every individual to be allowed to use one's own body, intelligence, or wealth according to one's will and without doing harm to others.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, he wanted to destroy all the obstacles on the way to freedom. He said, 'Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily' (5.147). But his concept of freedom is wider still, for he conceived not only of political, social, and economic freedom, but also of spiritual freedom: 'Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for' (6.86).

Swamiji's unique concept of development includes both material and spiritual aspects of human life, and it is interesting to note that the modern concept of development is slowly following his footsteps. This becomes clear from Todaro's definition of development: 'Development, in its essence, must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, turned to the basic diverse needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually "better"'.<sup>17</sup>

**Capability Approach** • Amartya Sen conceived and developed 'capability approach' as an alternative to the utility approach in the context of underdeveloped and developing countries. This concept has provided a sound intellectual foundation for human development—for including participation, human well-being, and freedom as central features of development. It has generated considerable research in moral philosophy, economics, political theory, education, health, food security, ecosystems, empowerment, and other areas. 'Capability' refers to the options or alternatives from which a person can choose. Thus, 'the notion of capability is essentially one of freedom—the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead'.<sup>18</sup>

Freedom are of different kinds, and they augment and consolidate each other. Humans make use of one kind of freedom to boost freedoms of other kinds. The integral nature of human lives leads to inescapable interrelations between the different domains of living. For example, lack of freedom in the form of illiteracy can severely re-

strict a person's economic opportunities. Conversely, school education not only advances social and cultural freedoms, it also enhances economic opportunities.

Poverty, according to the capability approach, lies not merely in the impoverished state in which a person actually lives, but is also the lack of real opportunities—due to social constraints and personal circumstances—to choose a meaningful state of living. Poverty is, in this view, ultimately a matter of 'capability deprivation'. Freedoms are, therefore, the principal means as well as the primary ends of development.

The concept of capability, however, is nothing new. Swami Vivekananda considered everyone to be endowed with infinite potential capabilities. To him a person needs the proper environment to manifest them. He says: 'There is infinite power of development in everything; that is my belief'.<sup>19</sup> And: 'Let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak,

## Prioritizing Our Developmental Concerns

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Expansion of basic human capabilities, including such freedoms as the ability to live long, to read and write, to escape preventable illnesses, to work outside the family irrespective of gender, and to participate in collaborative as well as adversarial politics, not only influence the quality of life that the Indian people can enjoy, but also affect the real opportunities they have to participate in economic expansion. ...

... [In India] so much energy and wrath have been spent on attacking or defending liberalization and deregulation that the monumental neglect of social inequalities and deprivations in public policy has received astonishingly little attention in these debates. The issues underlying liberalization are not, of course, trivial, but engagement on these matters—in opposition or in defence—cannot justify the conformist tranquillity on the neglected provisions of public education, health care, and other direct means of promoting basic human capabilities. In fact, sometimes contentious regulational

matters seem to get astonishing priority in political discussions over more foundational concerns related directly to the well-being and freedom of the mass of Indian citizens. Debates on such questions as the details of tax concessions to be given to multinationals, or whether Indians should drink Coca Cola, or whether the private sector should be allowed to operate city buses, tend to 'crowd-out' the time that is left to discuss the abysmal situation of basic education and elementary health care, or the persistence of debilitating social inequalities, or other issues that have a crucial bearing on the well-being and freedom of the population. In a multi-party democracy, there is scope for influencing the agenda of the government through systematic opposition, and the need to examine the priorities of public criticism is as strong as is the necessity that the government should scrutinize its own relative weights and concerns.

—Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen

behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good' (3.193).

There are two types of freedom: positive and negative. Positive freedom includes those supportive influences which help a person do things that he or she wants to do. Negative freedom is not being prevented from doing certain things. Swamiji spoke of both types of freedoms—positive ones like freedom from hunger, ignorance, and weakness, and negative ones like freedom from social discrimination, injustice, and exploitation. According to him both these freedoms are to be granted to the masses for India to develop. Again, Swamiji stressed freedom as the primary condition for and the ultimate goal of social and economic development: "Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being." Where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down' (5.29). 'To advance oneself towards freedom—physical, mental and spiritual—and help others to do so, is the supreme prize of man' (5.147).

However, only capability enhancement cannot bring out effective economic development. One has to be also endowed with the capacity to clearly perceive the capabilities at hand. The capacity to exercise freedom of choice through clearly perceiving the available alternatives has to be developed together with the provision of those alternatives. The following example helps to clarify the point.

A pulse polio immunization programme in Haldiria, West Bengal, recorded a turnout of forty per cent. The *Statesman*, dated 3 June 2003, reported that 'During the last immunization campaign, villagers armed with daggers, lathis and razors had resisted health workers on the ground that administering polio drops was against Islam.' This incident clearly shows that mere capability enhancement, in this case through the offering of a free health service, could not succeed because it was not preceded by awareness enhancement. Proper awareness of the benefits of immunization against polio would have helped overcome prejudices that prevented people

from taking advantage of the enhanced capabilities.

The enhancement of this mental capacity, the capacity to exercise freedom of choice, is more fundamental than mere enhancement of capability. The work for the deprived masses is in the right direction only when, according to Swamiji, 'they will come to understand their own condition and feel the necessity of help and improvement' (6.427). Therefore, the primary responsibility of education is to make the masses aware of their true condition: 'They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation' (4.362). A rise in expectation is the prime need for India's economic development.

Often it is observed that capability deprivation is not imposed on a person by external agencies, it is self-imposed. The cause of this self-imposed denial is lack of awareness. Swamiji thundered, 'Going round the whole world, I find that people of this country are immersed in great Tamas (inactivity), compared with people of other countries' (7.181). Economists and social thinkers have termed this state 'pathetic contentment' and have noted that it 'is a characteristic feature of underdeveloped economies that the bulk of people therein do not want more goods and services and have a state of contentment with their lot that is truly pathetic in its implications for economic development.' This 'pathetic contentment' is traceable to a number of reasons, most of which are connected with the social and religious structure of the community. Swamiji too observed that in India the masses suffer from this pathetic contentment and have a pitiable lifestyle due to various social and religious rigidities. He found in them 'down-right inertness like that of stocks and stones' (*ibid.*). Thus, capability enhancement must be preceded by awareness enhancement.

Capability deprivation, therefore, has two dimensions: first, denial by social conditions and second, self-denial. Capability enhancement must address both these dimensions and these should be given equal importance while formulating any capability theory of poverty.

Swami Vivekananda's concept of 'Man-making' education aims at developing the capacity for correct thinking and choosing. He called this *atma-shraddha* or 'faith in oneself', which can be taken as a fundamental precondition for economic development. He also pointed out that, 'we, as a nation, have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and *raise the masses'* (6.255). Regaining this 'lost individuality' is vitally important. Through an individual and collective awakening, this lost individuality can be restored. That is why Swamiji always emphasized awareness at individual and collective levels, to counteract self-denial and social-denial respectively.

### Causes of Lack of Freedom

**Economic Deprivation** · Swamiji was deeply moved by the appalling poverty and backwardness of India's downtrodden masses, and realized that this poverty and economic deprivation is the root cause of India's present decadence. To overcome this he insisted on an overall economic development.

**Illiteracy** · Swamiji traced the lack of education among the masses to its source and concluded that: 'The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men' (4.482). He further said, 'I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses' (*ibid.*).

**Poor Health Care** · Swamiji upheld physical strength as a basic requirement for well-being. He considered that physical weakness was responsible for much of India's misery and degradation (3.241). This idea is fundamental to the broader notion of human capabilities, which is the primary need for economic development.

**Infringement of Democratic and Civil Rights** · Secular humanism stresses free thinking. Accordingly, we should frame only such laws as would help people in the practical or even political sense. Swamiji was of the view that people should

be given freedom; laws are to be framed on some common values, which form the fulcrum of human relationship, but the goal is essentially freedom.<sup>20</sup> Democracy and freedom are intricately related and are essential criteria of growth and development. Swamiji said, 'In the West, society always had freedom, and look at them. ... Liberty is the first condition of growth.'<sup>21</sup>

(To be concluded)

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# **Swami Vivekananda and Nikola Tesla: New Findings**

**Somenath Mukherjee**

**N**EAR the end of the nineteenth century two brilliant men with callings far apart came close to each other in the US. One was a Vedantist par excellence, the other a scientist of a rare calibre. At the time of their meeting both were celebrities in their own right. And even today the world has hardly outlived the worth of their individual contributions.

## **A Unique Dinner**

It was 5 February 1896, a Wednesday night. A dinner was arranged at 425 Fifth Avenue, New York. The address belonged to Austin Corbin, the famous American railroad businessman. The *New York Herald* reported on 9 February that the dinner 'was perhaps the most unique entertainment in the social calendar of the winter season', and that it was arranged by the hostess 'in order that Mme Sarah Bernhardt might meet the Swami Vivekananda'. A few lines later, while describing that Vivekananda was surrounded by 'a brilliant company of young people', the paper mentioned the name of 'Professor Nikola Tesla, the electrician'. The *Herald* further hinted about 'the discourse of Professor Tesla, who is one of the inventors of photographing through opaque substances', as also the 'lengthy disputation on the great questions of life and death and the great hereafter', which the great trio along with the others were engaged in. The report concluded with the observation that 'it was an intellectual treat seldom encountered in social life in the metropolis'.<sup>1</sup>

For her enormity of talent, versatility, greatness, and interest in Swami Vivekananda, Sarah Bernhardt deserves an exclusive article. Here we shall only highlight the significance of her presence at the dinner by quoting the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

which introduced her as 'the greatest French actress of the 19th century and one of the best-known figures in the history of the stage'.

## **A Quiet Propinquity**

Nikola Tesla had frequented Vivekananda's public lectures in New York on his own, and when they actually met, both enjoyed the interaction. Vivekananda later said in his lecture at Kumbakonam in February 1897:

I have myself been told by some of the best Western scientific minds of the day, how wonderfully rational the conclusions of the Vedanta are. I know one of them personally who scarcely has time to eat his meal or go out of his laboratory, but who yet would stand by the hour to attend my lectures on the Vedanta; for, as he expresses it, they are so scientific, they so exactly harmonise with the aspirations of the age and with the conclusions to which modern science is coming at the present time.<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda and Tesla were, undoubtedly, inhabitants of a soaring cerebral altitude well beyond the grasp, or even perception, of the multitudes. Both were instantly drawn towards each other's works and embarked on matters normally left untouched by ordinary mortals. We find that a few days following the dinner, on 13 February, Vivekananda wrote to his European disciple E T Sturdy:

Mr Tesla was charmed to hear about the Vedantic Prana and Akasha and the Kalpas, which according to him are the only theories modern science can entertain. Now both Akasha and Prana again are produced from the cosmic Mahat, the Universal Mind, the Brahma or Ishvara. Mr Tesla thinks he can demonstrate mathematically that force and matter are reducible to potential energy. I am to go

and see him next week, to get this new mathematical demonstration. In that case, the Vedantic cosmology will be placed on the surest of foundations (5.101).

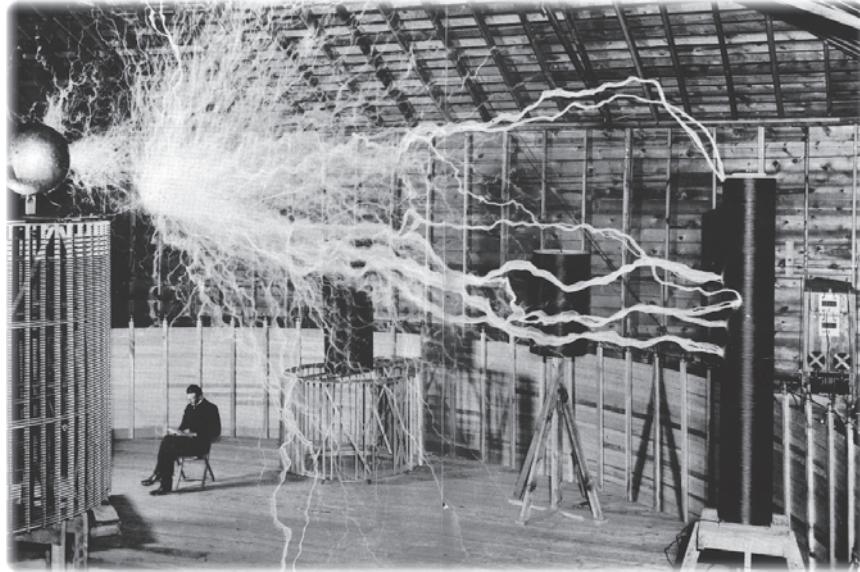
Opinion contemporary to our time has thus summed up Nikola Tesla's contribution to science: 'It is nearly impossible to enter a modern room or vehicle, whether an automobile or the space shuttle and not see some device, whether a computer screen or a telephone, that can be traced back to his genius.'<sup>3</sup> Let us draw a short biographical sketch of this man and see the justification for such assertions.

### ***The Scientist and Inventor***

Nikola Tesla was born on 10 July 1856 at Smiljan in Croatia. Because a thunderstorm was raging the night Nikola was born, his mother prophesied that her son will be a 'child of light'. Born to a priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Tesla studied at the Austrian Polytechnic in Graz. He left Graz in 1878 and took his first appointment as an assistant engineer, for a year, in Slovenia. Later, he went to study at the Charles-Ferdinand branch of the University of Prague. Following his father's death, he abruptly left the university after completing a single term. In 1881 he worked for the American Telephone Company in Budapest.

Tesla went to Paris in 1882 to work as an engineer with the Continental Edison Company. During this time he came up with his induction motor and began developing various devices that used rotating magnetic fields—for which he obtained patents in 1888. But the European engineers were not ready for Tesla's innovation, and on 6 June 1884 he emigrated to the US to try his luck there. While entering America, Tesla was carrying a letter of recommendation in which the manager of his previous company wrote to Thomas Alva Edison, 'I know two great men and you are one of them; the other is this young man' (*ibid.*).

TESLA MEMORIAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK



*Tesla sits below the 'Tesla Coil' in his Colorado Spring Laboratory. The coil creates millions of volts of electricity with a frequency rate of 100,000 alterations per second. This photograph demonstrates Tesla's unique flair for publicity. It was made using both timed and double exposures and shows Tesla calmly reading, apparently during a raging indoor lightning storm. It was first published in the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, June 1900*

Accordingly, Tesla obtained an appointment with Edison Machine Works as an electrical engineer. Besides the recommendation letter, Tesla also had with him two other items: a few self-written poems and a diagram of an aircraft—fifteen years before the Wright brothers presented their aircraft project.

Edison was the inventor of DC electricity and he firmly believed in its future. Tesla, contrarily, was intently focused on his AC polyphase design, and was sure of its superiority. Shortly, the inevitable happened, and Tesla had to leave Edison Machine Works. Although in 1886 he had already created his own company—Tesla Electric Light & Manufacturing—the financial investors were sceptical of his project. So, in 1886 and 1887 Tesla had to even work as a common labourer to earn his sustenance and build a meagre capital to pursue his dream.

In 1887 he came up with the first brushless alternating current induction motor. As was stated earlier, in February 1882 Tesla discovered the rotating magnetic field, which happens to be a fundamental principle in physics and the basis of nearly all devices that use alternating current. After developing the polyphase alternating current system of generators, motors, and transformers, in 1888 Tesla presented his invention to the American Institute of Electrical

Engineers through a paper that became a classic: 'A New System of Alternating Current Motors and Transformers'. Later he obtained forty basic US patents connected with this invention. After a short time he sold the patents of his polyphase system to the US industrialist George Westinghouse, the owner of the Westinghouse Electric Company. Tesla had two motives behind this transaction: he wanted to ensure that his invention had a broader application and that he could work uninterruptedly for its development. With such aims in mind Tesla even joined up with the Westinghouse Electric Company in Pittsburgh. In 1889 he became a US citizen.

An unavoidable battle followed; on the surface it was between two technologies—DC electricity versus AC electricity. Underneath it was a battle between two extraordinary persons with diametrically opposite approaches to work and science—Thomas Alva Edison and Nikola Tesla. But science or industry has never shown any bias or preferences for individual characters; it has always evaluated things from a utilitarian point of view. And in this test Nikola Tesla, or for that matter the Westinghouse Electric Company, had a quick and decisive win. The benefit went to both America and the world at large. As Isaac Asimov summed it up: 'Edison had committed himself to direct current, and he fought the use of alternating current, but he lost eventually.'<sup>4</sup>

Tesla's invention was first used on a massive scale in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the Westinghouse Electric Company had been entrusted to provide electricity. In 1895 Westinghouse was awarded the Niagara Falls Power Project. Using the generators and motors invented by Tesla, power was harnessed from the waterfall and AC electricity was delivered to Buffalo, a distance of about thirty-five kilometres from the falls.

Nikola Tesla was a phenomenal genius and his penchant for inventions could never be sated. In 1891 he developed the 'Tesla Coil', a type of high-frequency transformer that we still use in our radio and television transmissions. During the period between 1891 and 1893 he lectured in many parts of America and Europe and elicited widespread in-

terest in the use of high-frequency currents, which soon became known as 'Tesla Currents'. In 1893 he predicted wireless communication and devised basic circuits and apparatuses for this purpose. These were later adapted by Tesla himself as well as by others while developing actual wireless transmission. Tesla also generated artificial lightning in one of his laboratories in 1899.

Among his other notable achievements were the path-breaking experiments in shadowgraphs, similar to those that gave birth to X-rays in 1895 at the hands of Wilhelm Röntgen. The neon or fluorescent lighting system also has Nikola Tesla as its creator. Besides, Tesla made valuable contributions in later days to the development of the radar and the aircraft.

But Tesla's brilliance was confined to his scientific pursuits; his financial needs were entirely overlooked. During his long life he was repeatedly hamstrung by this and, as a consequence, faced deprivation and solitude in his later days. As early as 1900 Tesla proposed to provide worldwide wireless communication and to furnish facilities for transmitting pictures, messages, weather warnings, and stock reports over long distances. For this mega project he raised a sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the great American financier John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913). This project was very dear to his heart, but had to be abandoned for eventual non-cooperation from his financier and serious labour troubles.

When the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi (1874–1937) was given credit for inventing the radio, Tesla was hurt for being denied his legitimate recognition. He reportedly alleged in private that Marconi in his radio had used technologies for which Tesla held the original patents. Later Tesla took the matter to court to have his rights restored. It is ironical that in 1943, just after Tesla died, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld his claim and invalidated most of the patents held by Marconi for radio communication equipment.

In his almost unbelievable scientific feats, Nikola Tesla appears to be in a class of his own. But Tesla could also easily match any of the great tragic protagonists of Shakespeare. Anybody capable of cre-

ating even a single of his many inventions—he is reported to have had seven hundred patents in his name—could easily have achieved perpetual prosperity. But Tesla's fate was otherwise. On 18 May 1917 he was awarded the prestigious American Institute of Electrical Engineers' Edison Medal. Dr Bernard A Behrend, his physicist friend who presented him with the award, said in his speech: 'Were we to seize and eliminate from our industrial world the results of Mr Tesla's work, the wheels of industry would cease to turn, our electric cars and trains would stop, our towns would be dark, our mills would be dead and idle. ... His name marks an epoch in the advance of electrical science.'<sup>5</sup>

This apart, and notwithstanding the fact that he 'continued to invent devices of commercial and scientific worth' we find that 'he received little profit'. A bachelor who allowed himself only a few close friends, 'Tesla was a complete recluse in his last years, living in a series of New York hotel rooms with only pigeons for company'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1915 the *New York Times* had hinted that the year's Nobel Prize for physics would go jointly to Thomas Alva Edison and Nikola Tesla. But that never happened, and none of the two legendary inventors were ever awarded the prize. Rumour had it that Tesla disagreed to share the prize with Edison, whom he did not consider a pure scientist; besides, he was aggrieved because Marconi had already received the Nobel Prize for an achievement which rightfully belonged to him.

On Monday 20 July 1931 the prestigious weekly *Time* came out with Tesla's picture on its cover honouring his 75th birth anniversary. In the cover story the magazine wrote:

People who all their lives have lived by means of the devices he has invented and

inspired, people who have forgotten there were an Alessandro Volta, an André Marie Ampère, a Georg Simon Ohm, a Charles Augustin de Coulomb, a Luigi Galvani or a James Watt, are reminded that there still is a Nikola Tesla (pronounced Teshlah) who long ago rave [sic] them the Tesla induction motor which made alternating current practical, and the Tesla transformer which steps up oscillating currents to high potentials (15,000,000 volts he avers, with 100,000,000 possible).<sup>7</sup>

Finally, on 8 January 1943 the *New York Times* came out with a full page obituary under the headline 'Nikola Tesla, 86, Prolific Inventor' which mentioned: 'Nikola Tesla, one of the world's greatest electrical inventors and designers, was found dead last night in his suite at the Hotel New Yorker'.<sup>8</sup>

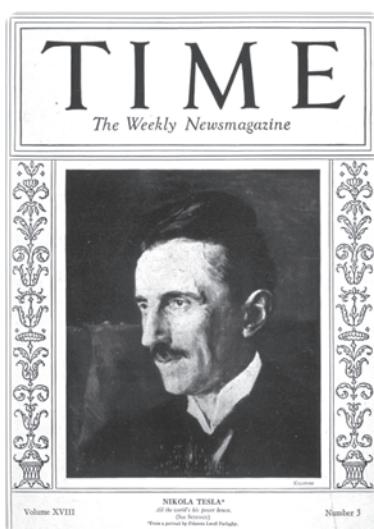
On 13 January 1943 the *New York Times*, while reporting the funeral, wrote under the heading '2,000 Are Present at Tesla Funeral':

Inventors, Nobel Prize winners, leaders in the electrical arts, high officials of the Yugoslav Government and of New York, and men and women who attained distinction in many other fields paid tribute yesterday to Nikola Tesla, father of radio and of modern electrical generation and transmission systems, at an impressive funeral service in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. ...

Many telegrams were received from officials of the United States Government, prominent scientists, literary men and many others ... Mrs Roosevelt's message read: 'The President and I are deeply sorry to hear of the death of Mr Nikola Tesla. We are grateful for his contribution to science and industry and to this country. ...

Drs. Millikan [Robert Andrews Millikan (1868–1953), American physicist and Nobel laureate], Compton [Arthur Holly Compton (1892–1962), American physicist and Nobel laureate] and Franck [James Franck (1882–1964), German-born American physicist, chemist and Nobel laureate] paid tribute to Tesla as one of the world's outstanding intellects, who paved the way for many of the important technological developments of the modern times (*ibid.*).

After this impressive funeral Tesla was relegated to an apparent oblivion till his birth centenary.



### Recognizing the Prodigal Genius

The Committee of Action of the International Electrotechnical Commission, in its meeting held in Munich on 27 June 1956, took the following decision:

In view of the celebration of the centenary of the birth of NIKOLA TESLA, which was [sic] to be held in Belgrade in July, 1956 and which Dr Dunsheath would attend, it was decided on the proposal of Mr Sogge that the President of the I.E.C. should convey the following message on behalf of the Commission to the NIKOLA TESLA Centenary Committee:

'The Committee of Action of the I.E.C. desires the President of the I.E.C. as its personal representative at the Tesla Centenary Celebration to convey to all who are there assembled, the warm greetings of the I.E.C. on this occasion in commemoration of the great Tesla. ...'

'The I.E.C. is very happy that this fact has been marked this year by the agreement they have reached for the world unit of magnetic flux density in the Giorgi system to be called "tesla".'

Forty-one years after the above recognition, the internationally acclaimed *Life* magazine wrote in its September 1997 issue: 'Tesla is among the 100 most famous people of the last 1000 years. He is one of the Great men who divert the stream of human history. ... He may be second only to his ex-boss Thomas Edison as the most farsighted inventor of the electric age. His work on the rotating magnetic field and alternating current ... helped electrify the world by enabling power to travel over wires to customers great distance away.'<sup>10</sup>

And before returning to the central theme of our article, we would better look into a recent revival of interest in Nikola Tesla:

The 21st century has seen a dramatic resurgence of interest in Tesla and his work. 2006, the 150th anniversary of his birth, was declared the Year of Tesla by UNESCO and was marked by celebrations in both his native Croatia and in his family's homeland, Serbia: Belgrade airport is now officially Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport. 2006 also saw the birth of the Tesla Roadster, a high-performance electric car designed by Lotus; perhaps less excitingly, though no less significantly, an engine on Silverlink's North London Line was named the Nikola Tesla in 2001.

This change in Tesla's posthumous fortunes is perhaps best reflected in the titles of his biographies: the first, published in 1944, was *Prodigal Genius*; 1981 saw him as a *Man Out of Time*; by 2001 he was *The Man Who Invented the Twentieth Century*.<sup>11</sup>

Besides, in 1975 America honoured Nikola Tesla by inducting him in the Inventor's Hall of Fame. Later, in 1983 the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp with Tesla's picture on it.

### The First Meeting

We still do not know when exactly Vivekananda had his first contact with Nikola Tesla. Therefore let us chronologically examine the occasions where their dual presence is known or assumed.

The very next day after reaching Chicago—probably on 2 August 1893<sup>12</sup>—Vivekananda went to visit the World's Fair where 'he visited the various exposition palaces, marvelling at the array of machinery, at the arts and products of many lands, and, above all, at the energy and practical acumen of the human mind as manifested by the exhibits. ... He continued to frequent the fair, eager to absorb all that was of value. He was fascinated by the splendour and perfect organization of it all.'<sup>13</sup>

We also have proof of Tesla's presence at the Fair ground:

At the 1893 World's Fair, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, an international exposition was held which for the first time devoted a building to electrical exhibits. It was an historic event as Tesla and George Westinghouse introduced visitors to AC power by using it to illuminate the Exposition. On display were Tesla's fluorescent lamps and single node bulbs.

Tesla also explained the principles of the rotating magnetic field and induction motor by demonstrating how to make an egg made of copper stand on end in his demonstration of the device he constructed known as the 'Egg of Columbus'.<sup>14</sup>

Given their mutual roles on this occasion—one an eager and absorbed spectator and the other a remarkable scientist displaying unbelievable feats to

the spectators—the chances that they got to know each other are low; the mass of spectators thronging the fair everyday was in itself a hindrance.

Another possible occasion when they might have met for the first time was the dinner Prof. Elisha Gray gave in honour of the swami:

Because of the various congresses held in connection with the World's Fair, Chicago was at this period a meeting-place of some of the best minds of the day. Inevitably, the Swami came in contact with many thinkers, famous and influential in their own fields. In September of 1893, immediately following his appearance at the Parliament, he was introduced to a group of noted scientists who had gathered in the city to attend the Electrical Congress, held from August 21 through 25. A vegetarian dinner was given especially in his honour by Professor Elisha Gray, the inventor of electrical equipment, and his wife in their beautiful residence in Highland Park, Chicago. Among the distinguished guests invited to meet him were Ariton Hopitalia, Sir William Thomson, afterwards Lord Kelvin, Professor Hermann von Helmholtz, the last two of whom were eminent in the field of physics. The Swami's knowledge of electricity amazed the scientists, and his shining repartee bearing on matters of science was greeted with sincere pleasure. With one voice they acclaimed him a sympathetic *confrère*.<sup>15</sup>

Although Tesla's presence at the above dinner has not yet been proved, considering his vocation and achievements, there is scope for assuming his presence.

The next possibility takes us to New York, 1896. A clue is given by the swami himself in his lecture 'The Mission of the Vedanta' at Kumbakonam cited earlier. According to Marie Louise Burke, the eminent researcher on Vivekananda's activities in the West, Nikola Tesla had frequented the swami's public lectures in New York during the early part of 1896. It also corresponds with the swami's claim about the scientist 'who yet would stand by the hour to attend my lectures on the Vedanta', as we have seen before. Vedanta was the central theme of the seven Sunday public lectures of the swami in January and February 1896, held first in the Hardman Hall and then at the

Madison Square Garden, New York. If Tesla were present at one or more of these lectures, the speaker could have noticed him. But, again, their coming into close contact on these occasions was difficult; moreover, we have nothing to confirm this guess.

In sum, the first clear mention of their actual meeting is found in the swami's letter to Sturdy cited above. We have, therefore, no other evidence to validate a meeting between Vivekananda and Tesla prior to the dinner arranged by the Corbins.

(To be concluded)

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# A Famous Dinner

Dr Hironmoy Mukherjee

**O**N 21 November 1896 three Indians of repute met at a dinner organized by the Cambridge Indian Majlis in London. The dinner was held in honour of K S Ranjit Singh and Atulchandra Chatterjee. The third Indian who had been invited to attend and respond to 'the toast of India' was none other than Swami Vivekananda. There was another Indian who was also making a name for himself in London at that time—the famous scientist Dr Jagadishchandra Bose. We do not know whether he was invited—he certainly deserved an invitation—but he was not present on the occasion. Jagadishchandra was to become closely associated with the Ramakrishna movement, and Swami Vivekananda would often speak of the scientific achievements of this 'pride and glory of Bengal'.

## **Swami Vivekananda in England**

Before we take a look at the achievements of the two Indians who were being felicitated, let us first briefly review Swami Vivekananda's activities in England that year. During his first visit to the West, Swamiji visited England twice. He first came to England from the US—via Paris—in the second week of September 1895 and stayed there for three months before returning to America. He came to England again on 20 April 1896 and spent a productive eight months—interspersed by a nine-week vacation on the continent—before leaving for India on 16 December. Of his first visit to England he wrote to Alasinga Perumal on 18 November 1895: 'In England my work is really splendid, I am astonished myself at it. The English people do not talk much in newspapers, but they work silently. I am sure of more work in England than in America.'<sup>1</sup> His first public lecture in London—on 'Self-knowledge', delivered at Prince's Hall in Piccadilly—was at-

tended by 'a large gathering of people, representing all walks of life and comprising some of the best thinkers in London'. Newspapers interviewed him and called him the 'Indian Yogi'. The *London Daily Chronicle* wrote that he reminded people of Buddha. Several important clergymen showed warm appreciation. But the swami's greatest acquisition in this visit to London was Miss Margaret E Noble, who later became his disciple—Sister Nivedita—and consecrated her life to women's education in India. She was also to become the rallying point for Indian freedom fighters and a patron of renaissance in Indian arts and science.

When Swami Vivekananda returned to London in April 1896, he was delighted to meet his brother disciple Swami Saradananda, who had arrived in England on 1 April. The two swamis had not seen each other since January 1891 and had much news to share. While Swamiji amazed his brother monk with tales of successes in the West and his plans for the future, Swami Saradananda on his part informed Swamiji about the Alambazar Math, the then headquarters of the young Ramakrishna Order, and of the other brother disciples. Mahendranath Datta, the elder of Swamiji's two young brothers, soon joined them. Mahendranath found in Swamiji a new power and presence. And Swami Saradananda was stunned by a remark Swamiji let drop while speaking of his mission to Miss Henrietta Müller: 'I will have a lot of difficult work to do in this life. Compared with last time, there is much more to be done.' A little later he said, 'I have just begun my work; in America I have raised only one or two waves; a tidal wave must be raised; society must be turned upside down; the world must be given a new civilization. The world will understand what that Power is and why I have come. Compared with the

power I showed last time, it will be tremendous.' Marie Louise Burke notes: 'When one remembers that Swamiji once later remarked, "This time I have left nothing unsaid," it is not too difficult to believe that to the small and intimate group ... he suddenly gave expression to the underlying facts of his existence on this earth and of his place in history—facts such as a prophet of his stature intuitively knows.'<sup>2</sup>

Soon after settling down in London, Swami Vivekananda plunged into a whirlwind of activity. From the beginning of May he conducted five classes a week and a Friday evening question-and-answer session. He also gave a series of three Sunday lectures in one of the three large art galleries of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours at Piccadilly. Besides, he spoke at the Theosophists' Blavatsky Lodge at the invitation of Annie Besant and addressed several well-known clubs and drawing-room meetings. Many of his important lectures on *jnana yoga*, containing the essence of Vedanta philosophy, were given in England. *Queen, the Lady's Newspaper* observed: 'We cannot but own that the man possesses a great magnetic power or some power divine by which he even draws so many Londoners towards him' (4.161).

Max Müller, the reputed German Sanskritist who had written about Sri Ramakrishna in the prestigious *Nineteenth Century* magazine, was keen to meet a direct disciple of the Master. Swamiji visited him on 28 May 1896 and was impressed by his love for India. Swamiji also made the acquaintance of Capt. J H Sevier and Mrs Charlotte E Sevier who, along with Miss Noble and J J Goodwin, became the swami's staunch lifelong followers.

Swamiji presided over a social conference of Indian residents in Great Britain and Ireland, held under the auspices of the London Hindu Association on 18 July 1896. He impressed the audience with his commanding presence, speech, and personality. John Fox noted that he 'never heard him so eloquent, so earnest—in appealing to the young Hindus to give up European dress and airs on returning home, and mingling with the people and trying to help them. He denounced caste in the strongest terms,

and spoke finely on the position of women' (4.233–4). By now Swamiji had become a national hero to the Indians. In August the *Indian Nation* reported:

The two most conspicuous Indians now in England are Swami Vivekananda and Mr. K. S. Ranjitsinghi [sic]. In a sense they represent extremes, but both alike are extremes of excellence. Vivekananda soars on the aerial altitudes of the spirit; and Mr. Ranjitsinghi represents the perfection of certain kinds of physical accomplishment. The Swami, on his plane, is brilliant, original, illuminating. Alike by his presence, his teaching, and the magnetism of his soul he has impressed large numbers of men and women in England. He has not only rescued the religion of the Hindus from the reproach of a gross and grovelling idolatry but placed it on a height and in a light which cannot but secure the respect of men. The young Rajput Chief in his sphere stands gloriously first and has distanced all competitors as widely as Boswell was regarded by Macaulay to have distanced other biographers. He is the best bat in England, the country most distinguished for the skill of its players. ... He thus sheds a rare lustre on his countrymen, for he exhibits a skill which Englishmen highly value and has achieved a distinction of which they cannot but be jealous (4.234).

Even as Swamiji was holding the Hindu Association audience spellbound with his oratory, Prince Ranjit Singh was saving English honour against the Australian cricket team. He had scored 154 runs and was 'not out'.

### **Ranjit Singh**

Colonel HH Sir Ranjitsinghi Vibhaji Jadeja, Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, GCSI, GBE (10 September 1872–2 April 1933) was known famously as K S Ranjitsinghi, or Ranji for short. Called the 'black prince of cricketers', Ranji has been widely regarded as one of the greatest batsmen of all time. Neville Cardus described him as a 'midsummer night's dream of cricket'. Unorthodox in technique and possessed of exceptionally fast reactions, he brought a new style to batting that revolutionized the game. He excelled in late cuts and popularized the leg glance. The Ranji Trophy, the most important first-class cricket tournament in India, was named in his honour and



Prince K S Ranjitsinghji

### Prabuddha Bharata

inaugurated in 1935 by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.<sup>3</sup>

Ranji was born at Sarodar, a small village in Kathiawar, Gujarat, into a wealthy Indian family of princely status. His clan, the Jadejas, were Rajput warriors. He was adopted

the English. It was also suggested that if India had sought to make herself heard and understood by the people who control her from afar, she could not have found a more triumphant missionary than the prince with his smile and bat. Such was his popularity that the London newspaper *India* suggested that Ranji might seek entry into the House of Commons as a liberal, and that if he did so then 'there seems to be no reason why in these athletic days he should not speedily become Prime Minister'.<sup>4</sup>

### Atulchandra Chatterjee and Jagadishchandra Bose

Atulchandra Chatterjee stood first in the highly competitive Indian Civil Service examination in 1896—a dream achievement for Indians. The son of Babu Hemchandra Chatterjee, Atulchandra went to England on a state scholarship and was admitted to King's College in Cambridge. Displaying extraordinary talent, he first cleared the intercollegiate examinations and then the tripos. Topping the Indian Civil Service Examination—which attracted many talented aspirants, both English and Indian—was of course his crowning achievement. This achievement was even more remarkable because, as Hafiz Sarwir observed at the Indian Majlis dinner, 'In the Indian Civil Service, Indians had to labour under various disadvantages; subject to the maximum of 2900 marks they are totally debarred from taking' (2.64).

In comparison to the successes of Atulchandra and Ranji, Jagadishchandra Bose's achievement was much greater. His father Bhagavanchandra Bose had, in spite of great financial difficulties, sent Jagadishchandra to England for higher studies. After having obtained a degree from Cambridge University in 1884, Jagadishchandra returned to India and obtained the post of lecturer in physics at Presidency College, Calcutta, with great difficulty. Though the Anglo-Indian superiors in the education department were not willing to provide him with the facilities that he was entitled to for his researches, Jagadishchandra remained undaunted: he had offered himself as a sacrifice in his search for knowledge and in unravelling the mysteries of

by the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, a small princely state. As there were conspiratorial moves to dislodge him from his heirship to the principedom, and his life was in danger, Ranji was sent to England at the young age of nineteen. He was educated at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge University. Prior to his arrival at Cambridge in 1891, Ranji had never played an organized game of cricket. Nevertheless, he won a cricket blue in his final year and moved on to play county cricket for Sussex after graduation. He played his first county match at Lords in May 1895 and made his test debut for England in 1896, becoming the first Indian to play test cricket.

Ranji scored 62 and 154 not out against Australia at Old Trafford in his first test, becoming the second batsman after W G Grace to score a century on debut for England and also the first batsman to score a hundred before lunch. In his first overseas test innings, also against Australia in 1897, he scored 175, which was the highest test score at that time. In 1896 Ranji's batting average exceeded even that of the legendary W G Grace. It was written in his praise that no cricketer had ever won so peculiar a place in the affections of the English people—through his genius for the English game he had familiarized the English people with the idea of the Indian as a man of like affections. He was probably the first Indian to have touched the imagination of

### *A Famous Dinner*

nature. He could work very hard and had commensurate talent, so no impediment could stand in the way of his original researches.

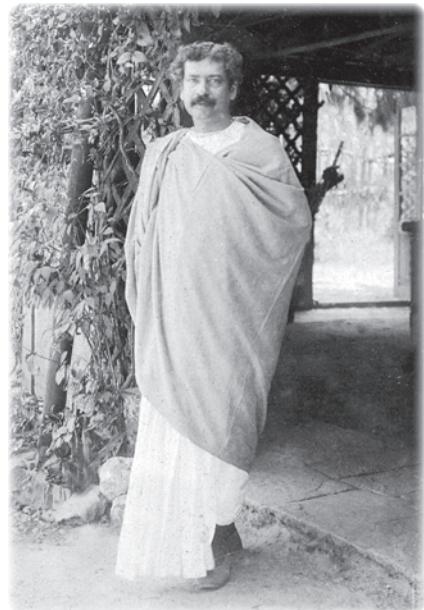
Continuing on the lines of the work done by Faraday, Maxwell, and Hertz, he conducted experiments on the quasi-optical properties of very short-frequency radio waves that helped him improve the design of the coherer, an early form of radio detector. His research papers were published in prestigious science journals in India and England. His successful demonstration of wireless communication at a public lecture in Calcutta in 1895 created great excitement in the Indian press. He was honoured with a Doctor of Science degree by the University of London in 1896. He visited England the same year and his lectures on electric waves given under the auspices of the British Association so impressed Lord Kelvin, the famous English scientist, that he wrote to the Secretary for India to the British government about the need for setting up a full-fledged science laboratory in India.<sup>5</sup> Later, Jagadishchandra conducted startling experiments in plant physiology demonstrating 'the apparent power of feeling in plants'. While Jagadishchandra received unstinted appreciation from Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita was to become his close friend and guide.

#### ***The Dinner***

Let us now go back to the famous dinner. As per custom, a number of toasts were proposed and many speeches given. Drinking to the health of the queen and praising the British Empire for its contribution to the welfare of Indians was a normal feature of such gatherings. In his reply to the toast, Ranji had—as would have been expected of the heir to the Nawanagar principedom—commended the British rule in India. He exhorted his countrymen to cooperate heartily with the British Empire. He jokingly added that Atulchandra's feat was better than his, since if he had started batting with a handicap of 2,900 runs he would probably have been ranked last in the list of batting averages.

Rising to respond to the toast of India, Swami Vivekananda wondered aloud why he had been in-

vited to respond to the toast 'unless it be for the reason that he in physical bulk bore a striking resemblance to the national animal of India'! But even while being humorous Swamiji could not but speak the truth: Not only in his physical form, but in



*Jagadishchandra Bose*

Swami Vivekananda's mind and soul the whole of India was present at that function. We might presume that he praised Ranji for his achievements as he was himself an avid sportsman, though no exact report is available in this respect. But taking 'the statement which the chairman had made that Mr Chatterjee was going to correct the mistake of past historians of India to be literally true', he stressed the value of and need for knowing and recording the real history of India—a history that would give Indians adequate self-respect and remove unhealthy feelings of slavishness from their minds.<sup>6</sup>

The speeches made by Ranji, Atulchandra, and other Indians praising the British rule in India could not have pleased Swamiji much. The famous saying of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, that Waterloo was won on the cricket field of Eton, had led many Indians to believe that Ranji's exploits on the cricket field, as well as the achievements of the other eminent contemporary Indians in their own fields, could lead to a reappraisal by the British rulers of the capability of Indians to govern themselves and ensure that steps were taken towards India's political freedom. Swamiji, however, harboured no such illusions. He pointed out that though India had fallen behind other nations, it was a temporary phase and that it would rise again:

*(Continued on page 203)*

# **Sister Nivedita: Art for National Awakening**

**Dr Anil Baran Ray**

MARGARET ELIZABETH NOBLE (1867–1911) was the principal of her own kindergarten school at Wimbledon, near London, when she met Swami Vivekananda in November 1895 at a gathering in the house of Lady Isabella Margesson. Vivekananda was then organizing the Vedanta movement in London. After a few more meetings, Margaret Noble took to Vedanta and expressed her wish to work for India to Swamiji. Indeed, by the time Swamiji left England for India in December 1896, Margaret Noble was already looking upon him as her master and had arrived at a turning point in her life.

After a year's wait, and after much persuasion on her part, Swami Vivekananda finally consented to Miss Noble's coming to India in January 1898 to work for the education of Indian women. Swamiji initiated her into the vows of brahmacharya on 25 March 1898, giving her the name Nivedita, 'the dedicated'.<sup>1</sup>

Having started a school for Indian girls at Bagh-bazar in November 1898, Nivedita gradually extended her work to the whole country, seeking to bring about a national awakening in the spheres of education, religion, politics, and art.<sup>2</sup> In the present article I shall focus on Nivedita's ideas on art—on how she contributed to the artistic development of India through the promotion of 'national art' and a 'new art movement'.

Nivedita was introduced to Indian art by Swami Vivekananda during their tour of North India in the summer of 1898.<sup>3</sup> On 19 July 1898, Swamiji took Nivedita and his American guests Mrs Ole Bull and Miss Josephine MacLeod<sup>4</sup> to the Temple of Pandrethan in Kashmir and gave Nivedita her first lessons in archaeology.<sup>5</sup> Nivedita spoke on Mother Kali and her symbolism in Calcutta—at

Albert Hall on 13 February 1899 and at Kalighat on 28 May 1899. The instructions she received from Swamiji on the spiritual import of Indian art symbols enabled her to perform creditably on both the occasions.<sup>6</sup> The Kalighat speech bore the germs of what Nivedita was to preach later as a champion of the new art movement in India. In this talk she made an important point: that Indian art was great in its inner spiritual beauty and that in any case such beauty carried greater weight and greater significance than the external beauty of European art. Nivedita sounded a note of caution against the imitation of European art which was so much in fashion at that time among some Indian artists. The message she sought to convey through her Kalighat lecture was that by Europeanizing her art, India would only downgrade her own great artistic heritage as also her contemporary art creations.

During her stay in London in the summer of 1899,<sup>7</sup> Nivedita visited the London museum and was deeply impressed by the ivory image of Goddess Durga exhibited there. This visit prompted her to write to Swami Akhandananda requesting him to send her a specimen image of Goddess Durga in brass or wood. Her object in procuring such an image was to explain to the West the beauty and significance of Goddess Durga's symbolism.<sup>8</sup>

While at Chicago in the winter of 1899, she was invited to give a lecture on the arts and crafts of India. Swami Vivekananda too was in Chicago at that time, which prompted Nivedita to consult him on the topic. 'He knows a great deal really,' observed Nivedita (1.250). She also wrote an interesting letter to Mrs Ole Bull asking her to send 'the Kali-print and some picture illustrative of the Europeanised degradation of Hindu Art' (1.248). Nivedita's purpose in asking for these was to show,

by comparing the classical image and its modern version—Europeanized and degraded, as she called it—that the *classical* stood head and shoulders above its *modern* counterpart, both by the value of the symbol and by the inner spiritual beauty of the image. Her lecture on the arts and crafts of India at the Hull House of Chicago went off so well that an elated Nivedita penned the following lines to Miss Macleod on 4 December 1899: 'Friday [December 1, 1899] I had great joy. I lectured before the Hull House Arts and Crafts Association, on the ancient arts of India, Kashmir shawl-making, Taj etc. etc.—was paid 15 dollars—and received orders for Hindu brass utensils and some embroideries!!!' (1.254).

It is evident from Nivedita's utterances at Albert Hall, Kalighat, and Hull House that her first lessons on the subject of Indian art, ideals, and beauty were had from Swami Vivekananda. Since in her own utterances, letters, and essays Nivedita essentially gave expression to her guru's ideas on art, Indian art in particular, a brief discussion of Swami Vivekananda's views on art will be in order.

### **Swami Vivekananda on Art**

Swami Vivekananda articulated his ideas on art during a conversation he had in 1901 with artist Ranadaprasad Das Gupta, the founder and professor of the Jubilee Art Academy, Calcutta. The swami said: 'I had the opportunity of seeing the beauties of art of nearly every civilised country in the world, but I saw nothing like the development of art which took place in our country during the Buddhistic period. During the regime of the Mogul Emperors also, there was a marked development of art—and the Taj and the Jumma Masjid etc. are standing monuments of that culture.'<sup>9</sup>

Further, Swamiji pointed out that true art was first an expres-

sion of an *idea* and second, a revelation just not of the external beauty of nature but more importantly, and more profoundly, of the inner beauty of things. The idea expressed through art should bring out the power and originality of the artist, and not merely display his skill. After all, art—a painting, for example—is different from a photograph in being the *likeness* as seen and interpreted through the originality of the artist's brain.

In bringing this originality into play, Swamiji went on to say, the Indian artist should focus on the 'characteristic idea' of the Indian nation: 'Each nation has a characteristic of its own. In its manners and customs, in its mode of living, in painting and sculpture is found the expression of that characteristic idea' (7.202). This means that different expressions for different people, in keeping with their national characteristics, was the order of true art, and this 'requirement' of art ruled out the *imitation* of the characteristic idea of one nation by another nation.

Swamiji observed that the primary bases as also the principal motives of art were different in Europe and India. In Europe people were largely material realists and hence their art took *fidelity to nature* as the primary basis and principal motive of art. The Indians believed in a transcendent Reality



beyond nature and so *ideality* is the principal motive of artistic development in India. Each must advance in its own way, innovating as best as it could in the process.

Swamiji observed sorrowfully that such was not the case with the India of his time. The contemporary Indian artists deviated from ideality, characteristic of India, and took to the European ways of expression, which could not but retard the development of art in India. 'Attempts to give expression to original ideas in art are no longer seen,' Swamiji lamented (7.203). He urged Ranadaprasad to work for the revival of ancient ideals in Indian art. He cited the example of his English poem 'Kali the Mother'—which captured the idea of Kali, the Universal Mother, as the union of the blissful and terrible aspects of existence—and asked Ranadaprasad to express through his brush that which he himself had done through his pen.

Swamiji next showed Ranadaprasad the design that he had sketched for the seal of the Ramakrishna Mission. The logo showed a wavy lake with a lotus in full bloom and a swan, the rising sun in the background, and a serpent encircling these. On Ranadaprasad expressing his inability to grasp the significance of the objects in the logo, Swamiji explained that the wavy waters of the lake symbolized karma, the full-blown lotus bhakti, the rising sun jnana, the encircling serpent yoga and the awakened kundalini, and the swan the Paramatman or the supreme Self. Taken as a unit the design expressed the idea that by the union of karma, jnana, bhakti, and yoga, the vision of the Paramatman is obtained (7.204).

Swamiji also showed Ranadaprasad a drawing of the proposed Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math and explained how he planned to bring together all that was best in Eastern and Western art in this temple. The plan of the prayer hall—its roof supported on numerous clustered pillars, its walls showing hundreds of lotuses in full bloom, its door having on its two sides the figure of a lion and a lamb licking each other, symbolizing the idea that great power and gentleness can indeed be united

in love—was particularly noteworthy, as was the conception of the temple as a whole, being built in such a style as to represent the symbol 'Om'.

Ranadaprasad, who was an artist of some distinction, was left spellbound by Swamiji's discourse on the ideals of art, particularly Indian art, and the vastness of his idea underlying the symbols of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. 'I have never heard such instructive words on the subject of art in my life. Bless me, sir, that I can work out the ideas I have got from you,' he said (7.205).

Nivedita was not an artist like Ranadaprasad, but what she said and did by way of giving a new dimension to the art movement of India—as also her promotion of young artists as the protagonists of the new art movement with the goal of national awakening in India—was singularly significant and bore the imprint of her guru's ideas on the subject. This will be evident as we proceed further into the subject.

### **Nivedita and Okakura Kakuzo**

Apart from Swami Vivekananda, Okakura Kakuzo and E B Havell were two other persons from whom Nivedita drew her nourishment in respect of her ideas on art and the art movement in India. Okakura came to Calcutta in January 1902 to take Swami Vivekananda to Japan to attend a congress

*Okakura Kakuzo*



of religions. Ailing as he was at that time, Swamiji could not make the trip to Japan, but having known that Okakura was a specialist in traditional Japanese art and that he was interested in classical Indian art too, Swamiji accompanied him to Bodh Gaya. During his week-long stay in Bodh Gaya, he explained to Okakura the spirit, artistic nuances, and historicity of the stone sculptures of the Mahabodhi temple.

Swamiji left his mortal frame on 4 July 1902, but Okakura's association with India and Indian art continued, with Nivedita stepping in as his 'guide' in India. Art was the common bond between the two. Okakura was a theoretician of art and a leader of the new art movement in Japan. Like Swamiji and Nivedita, he was of the opinion that the fashion of imitating Europe in art could not do Japan any good. His struggles in this respect against the Japanese establishment, his relinquishment of the post of Director of the Government Art School at Ueno, Tokyo, his founding of the Nippon Bijutsuin, or Hall of Fine Arts at Yanaka, in the suburbs of Tokyo, and his giving a new life to Japanese art through the Nippon Bijutsuin—all these, plus his theory that Asia is one and that Asian countries such as Japan and India must engage in cultural exchange of their respective treasures in art endeared Okakura to Nivedita so much that she agreed to rewrite Okakura's book, *Ideals of the East*, contributing, in the process, a rich 'Introduction' to the book, published in 1903.

In her 'Introduction', Nivedita made the following appreciative points about Okakura's book: (i) that Okakura stood firmly for a strong re-nationalizing of Japanese art in opposition to the pseudo-Europeanizing tendency that was so fashionable throughout the East; (ii) that it was very reassuring to be told by so competent an authority as Okakura that, like in religion during the era of Ashoka, India had once led the whole world in sculpture, painting, and architecture and that her influence in such spheres of art spread first to China and thence to Japan; (iii) that Okakura discounted the theory of Greek influence on Indian

sculpture, just as Swami Vivekananda did at the Paris Exhibition of 1900; and (iv) that Japan borrowed her ideals of art from India.

To these appreciative points about Okakura's book, Nivedita added the hope that art in India may rise again 'in a few decades and the world may again witness the Indianising of the East'.<sup>10</sup>

### **Nivedita and E B Havell**

Like Swami Vivekananda and Okakura, E B Havell, the British principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, stood in opposition to the Europeanization of Indian art and strongly promoted its re-nationalizing. As Havell's approach to Indian art was very similar to that of Nivedita, a bond of friendship developed between the two from their very first meeting on 28 February 1902 in Calcutta.<sup>11</sup> This relationship flowered in course of time and had far-reaching influence on the new art movement in India.

Havell's orientation to the Indian art as well as his position as principal of the Government School of Art at Calcutta enabled him to emerge as the champion of the new direction Indian art movement was to take. Unlike his predecessors in the office of the principal—Schaumburg and O'Gilardi—Havell, in the face of opposition from some of his Indian students, springing from their addiction to Europeanizing—so fashionable then among many students—as also ridicule and harassment by members of the British bureaucracy, was successful in introducing into the curriculum of the art school the age-old art styles of India: Ajanta, Mughal, Rajput, and the like. He encouraged his students to take to Indian subjects in painting, sculpture, and other forms of art and to follow in their artistic development the norms of what Swami Vivekananda, and later Nivedita, called 'Indianness' and 'ideality'. Like Swamiji, Havell too considered the imitation of the European art style by Indians as ugly. All this brought Nivedita and Havell together in the promotion of the new art movement in India.

Nivedita's letter of 28 February 1902 to Miss

MacLeod shows that she was first introduced to Havell by one Miss Hay: 'She took me to see the head of the Art School here—which was a success.' Nivedita reports Havell as saying to her in this first meeting that the government's orientation towards promoting Europeanism in Indian schools of art was not right and that though he was doing his best to turn the tide, he could only 'teach a man to draw and paint, but I cannot make him an artist, or a genius!' But Nivedita was sure she could do this by providing true and real inspiration to the apprentices: 'Love of Country—love of Fellows—Pride of birth—Hope for the Future—dauntless passion for INDIA—and there will be such a tide of Art, of Science, of Religion, of Energy, as no man can keep back. Instead of dolts—heroes—instead of copyist—original geniuses. All these one could create—all these must be created.'<sup>12</sup> Nivedita's contention was that generating an inspiration among people was the need of the day. Everything else can be achieved, provided there is this inspiration. The people have to be awakened first and trained later by providing them suitable opportunities.

The declaration of such resolve in the wake of her meeting with Havell marked the beginning of Nivedita's journey towards promotion of the new art movement in India. From now on Nivedita would redouble her efforts for the creation of a new national consciousness in art among the young artists who were enrolled as students at the Government School of Art, then under Havell's charge. In order to spread such consciousness over the country as a whole she would also wield her pen, writing vigorously on the necessity of using art as a means of shaping Indian nationality. She won over to this cause men like Ramananda Chatterjee who, through his able editorship of such journals as *Modern Review* and *Prabasi*, would help Nivedita diffuse her ideas.

Nivedita and Havell stood by each other in the pursuit of their mission on art. Havell had written an appreciative criticism of Okakura's *Ideals of the East*, and Nivedita considered this to be far more nuanced than the *Time's* review of the book, writ-

ten perhaps by Sir George Birdwood.<sup>13</sup>

Nivedita developed her own theory of the origin of the Shiva-linga, based on Swami Vivekananda's views expressed at the Paris Congress of the History of Religions in 1900. She was of the opinion that the linga was not a phallic symbol, rather it originated from the Buddhist stupa, and when Buddhism degenerated in India, the stupas were given the shape of linga by Buddhist tantras. Nivedita's point was that, though at some point the Shiva image got identified with the primitive phallic symbol, the general mass of Hindus never worshipped it as a sexual symbol of the formless God Mahadeva or of the more democratic Shiva. Nivedita was happy that Havell appreciated her theory of the origin of the Shiva-linga: 'It is most cheering to find that you think my theory of the Buddha-Siva Image so sound' (2.901).

Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting* was published in November 1908. Nivedita's unbounded admiration for this book comes through in her letter of 6 May 1909 to Gerald Nobel. Referring to Havell as 'my friend', she hailed his book for its 'beautiful illustrations' and particularly for creating 'a magnificent art-impulse in a new direction' (2.966). She was more expressive in her letter of 6 July 1909 to Havell: 'Your wonderful book!! Words fail me, to congratulate you properly. ... This is exactly the book we wanted—a readable, authoritative account, well-illustrated, of the psychological attitude in which competent persons might approach Indian art. For that is what it amounts to—and yours is the first attempt of its kind' (2.982).

Nivedita published three essays in the *Modern Review*—in its October, November, and December 1909 issues—recording her appreciation of Havell's book on the following counts: First, the book was especially inspiring for Indians because it saw India's past, present, and future as one. Unlike most other Europeans, Havell did not say that whatever might have been India's greatness in the past, Indians were degenerate at present and had nothing much to look forward to in the future. Instead he said, 'The builders of fortresses and tombs,

of palaces and temples are the same Indian people, who are alive today, and could do as much again, if need arose, or opportunity called.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the book was equally important because it called upon Indians to be courageous in believing that India had a 'living, traditional, and national art, intimately bound up with the social and religious life of the people'; that the depth and originality of Indian art arose from the heart-felt spiritual longings and desires of the people, that the Indian conception of beauty and its representation in art was spiritual rather than anatomical or physical, internal rather than external, transcendental rather than natural, that Indian art was to be understood only through Indian ideals, that Indian art had a style of its own that represented the calmness and assurance of the orient. Further, Havell argued that, like its ideal and style, Indian art was refreshingly original and not derivative in character, that 'the Greeks no more created Indian sculpture and painting than they created Indian philosophy and religion', and that the semi-Greek Gandharan art did not represent the genuine Indian sculpture, there being nothing in the Gandharan art of the lofty calm and simplicity of the Buddhas of Magadha or of the spontaneous sweetness and gentleness of the Dhyani Buddha of Borobudur (22–7).

Third, the book was candid in its admission that the deeper meanings and spiritual longings of Indian art were beyond the grasp of the average European and that while Europe had always made exaggerated claims about the impact of European art on art in India, it was very reticent in acknowledging the greater impact that Indian art had had on the art of Europe—say, in respect of Byzantine art or the Gothic churches of medieval Europe.

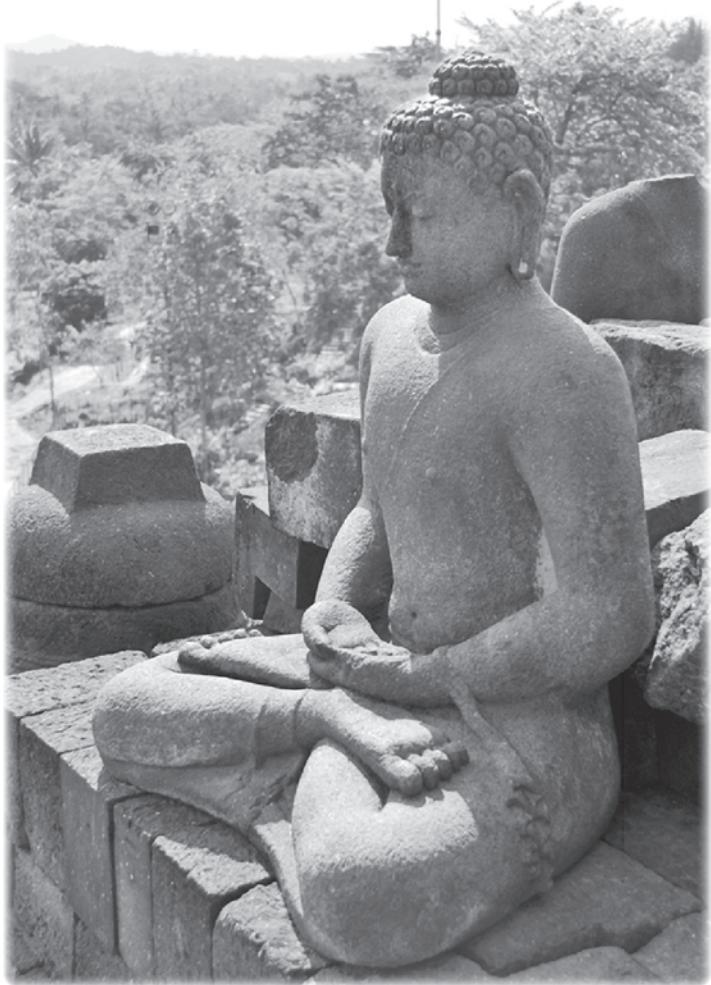
*(To be continued)*

## References

1. In giving Margaret Noble the name Nivedita, Swamiji blessed her and dedicated her to India, as expressed in the following lines that he penned for her:

The mother's heart, the hero's will,  
The sweetness of the southern breeze,

MARTIJN NIJENHUIS



*Dhyani Buddha of Borobudur*

The sacred charm and strength that dwell  
On Aryan altars, flaming, free;  
All these be yours, and many more  
No ancient soul could dream before—  
Be thou to India's future son  
The mistress, servant, friend in one.

See 'A Benediction' in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.178.

2. For a discussion on Nivedita's ideas on education, religion, and politics, see Mamata Ray and Anil Baran Ray, *India and 'The Dedicated': Towards the Rise of a Nation* (Howrah: Manuscript India, 2003).
3. Before she came to India, Margaret Noble had some exposure to art through training received in painting and design from Ebenezer Cooke; see *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, ed. Sankari Prasad Basu 2 vols (Calcutta: Nababharat, 1982), 2.655, 2.817.

*(Continued on page 205)*

# **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – VII**

**Dr M Sivaramkrishna**

**I**n my explorations of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta tradition in recent books I always come across unusual surprises. This time the surprise relates to the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. In his book *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction*, Martin Forward chooses Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi as one of his subjects.<sup>1</sup> This book is a fascinating and balanced introduction to the current scenario in this area. Martin Forward is the Helena Wackerlin Professor of Religious Studies at Aurora University, Illinois, and executive director of its Centre for Faith and Action. He tells us that 'at the age of twenty-three I went to India to be ordained deacon in the church of South India and to be captivated by friends who were Christians, Jews, Jains, Hindus, Muslims or Parsees'. In 1977 he returned to Britain. He is now based in Aurora, 'close to the great city of Chicago and its rich multi-cultural and multi-faith mix of people'. He considers that his 'own religious pilgrimage is simply a rather extreme example of the possibilities that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have opened up to many of the world's spiritual voyagers' (2).

## ***Sri Sarada Devi and Dialogue***

It is in this context that the Holy Mother figures, preceded by Socrates, St Paul, and Akbar. The professor points out that 'thus far my examples of dialogicians have been men. All of them have been public figures and, in many societies, the public arena has been open only to men until very recently. In some places, it still is. A woman's place is in the home has been the maxim in most cultures and religions. ... Still women have been and remain no less religious than men, probably more so, in fact.' And he cites 'Sri Sarada Devi (1853–1920) as an example' (25).

Pinpointing her uniqueness, Forward says that

Sri Ramakrishna's advising her about her role as 'a spiritual teacher', which needed cultivation of 'detachment from transitory things and ... devotion to God who alone is real and everlasting', may 'seem a typical piece of masculine browbeating'. But '*having helped her accomplish all she could be, he then learned from her*' (emphasis added). The Shodashi Puja signalled this: 'Ramakrishna offered himself completely to the Divine Mother revealed in the person of Sarada' (26).

Forward tells how the Holy Mother later became the 'guide and inspiration of the new Ramakrishna Order' and more importantly, 'the emphasis in Ramakrishna's teaching upon the unity of all religious experience was not lost upon' her. No wonder, she became a Mother to all, such as to 'Ambika, a village watchman, and Azad, a Muslim devotee' (27). Forward cites the incident where Mother admonished her niece when she threw food from a distance on Amzad's plate and how Mother herself cleaned up everything after Amzad had had his food.

In essence, the Holy Mother's unique significance is seen by the professor as an instance in which 'religion has sometimes enabled some women to subvert roles traditionally assigned to them'. They 'have lived lives so transparent to Transcendence, as their disciples interpret it, that they have become exemplary figures'. They broke 'to some extent' 'the bonds of conventional patriarchal assumptions about what they should be and do'. And, Forward adds, 'Not only Sarada but also the Muslim Rabia of Basra, the Christian Julian of Norwich and many other women saints and mystics illustrate this point' (27).

The many constraints notwithstanding, Holy Mother 'lived a life of piercing goodness and intuitive insight into Transcendent grace and goodness.

Furthermore, the internal resources of her faith that all religions were paths to Transcendence provided her with an active generosity towards others when occasions arose in which she could so easily have practiced conventional religious and cultural apartheid' (27–8).

These observations point to the enormous potential for exploring Holy Mother's transcendental significance in the context of strident feminism which, in spite of its somewhat mellowed posture, continues to mark gender studies and practices. As Giti Sen's marvellous study of what she calls 'feminine fables' in contemporary arts shows, the emergence of 'Shakti' is unmistakable in various fields, not merely in arts. And it is extremely suggestive and appropriate that Sen quotes in the beginning of her chapter on 'Hathayogini Shakti'—the goddess within—the Shodashi Puja episode from the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (249–52).<sup>2</sup>

Sri Sarada Devi also features in a visual text in another interesting book on feminism in India. The context is Sister Nivedita's role in the Indian nationalist movement and women's upliftment. The photo shows the Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita. Though there is no comment on Holy Mother, Radha Kumar does analyse Swami Vivekananda's role in contemporary women's liberation movements: 'Within the reform movements,' she says, 'a certain degree of criticism of earlier methods of campaigning was beginning to take place: Vivekananda, for example, mounted attacks on Bengali social reforms for adopting Western values and forms, and being elitist.'<sup>3</sup>

The divine trio obviously has a many-faceted significance. Whereas Martin Forward analyses the interfaith context and women, Giti Sen and Radha Kumar point, respectively, to the rise of the goddess power in arts and critique Western reformist strategies vis-à-vis women. And the curious blending of pluralist approaches is given a visual representation in which the Holy Mother and Sister Nivedita appear. Who would have thought the Irish Sister—used to the vast expanses of geography, history, and culture—and the narrow Nahabat-dwelling, though cosmically spaced, Holy Mother would be juxtaposed in a

photo, the triumph of Western technology?

Another interesting item in the same area of interfaith dialogue surfaced in my reading. This is a book of readings in interfaith theology. It consists of selections from well-known scholars like Karl Barth, Martin Buber, Teilhard de Chardin, the Dalai Lama, William Ernest Hocking, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Raimundo Panikkar, and Mahatma Gandhi. There is also an extract from Swami Vivekananda, and in the introduction the editor Dan Cohn-Sherbok says: 'The Hindu scholar [...] Vivekananda was a follower of Ramakrishna and devoted himself to preaching a version of his thought. Here he argues that the Orient is superior to Western countries in religious affairs. Christ, he argues, was an oriental religious figure.'<sup>4</sup>

The extract from Swamiji which appears in this book is titled 'Christ the Messenger' and is not from the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* but from another anthology edited by Paul J Griffiths, entitled *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990). In this two-page extract Swamiji focuses on 'the Oriental mind' and sees 'Jesus of Nazareth ... [as] the true son of the Orient, intensely practical' (221–2). The other extracts reinforce this theme.

Two significant elements of Dan Cohn-Sherbok's reader are worth noting. One is the variety of people represented here. Not all are theologians—Mahatma Gandhi is one example. Does this suggest that theology needs to be redefined? The other point is the incorporation of extracts not from their originals but from other comparable anthologies. Does this not suggest that the editor's exposure to the sources is somewhat derivative? Of course, this does not take away from the value and significance of the extract—Swamiji's description of Christ as an Oriental is not that of a mere scholar but a *perception*, the word-rendering of which is necessarily different from the language of the analyst and the scholar. Or, so it seems to me.

### ***Swami Vivekananda and Seva***

Swami Vivekananda's perception of service—work

as worship—is also receiving much attention in recent studies. One such is a volume of five hundred and fifteen pages, by Professor Shrinivas Tilak who has a PhD in history of religions from McGill University, Montreal, and has lectured at various universities in Canada. His book is a study of the concept of karma from the perspectives of Paul Ricoeur's philosophy and hermeneutics. It says: 'The overall hermeneutical and anthropological approach employed in the present work is informed by the epic Mahabharata (which includes the Bhagavadgita) and by philosophical anthropology as it comes across in the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005).'<sup>5</sup>

This is a fascinating study of, among other things, social activism as it arises from ethical and religious ethos and it figures representatives of this ideology such as Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda. It is a very closely reasoned and acutely thought-out thesis. Professor Tilak says: 'Individuals whose thoughts and projects are examined in depth consists [sic] of five key twentieth-century figures who sought to posit new and distinct activist forms of thought and behaviour—Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Dr. Dwarakanath Shantaram Kotnis and V. Shantaram' (21–2). These pioneers of Indian renaissance are explored in terms of Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics, which emphasizes action in the contexts of social realities, cultural complexes, and intellectual traditions. Thus, proper action has human good as its orientation.

It is in this complex interpretative text that Swamiji figures. His 'achievement' is seen to reflect what Dharmashastra texts indicate as *atidesha* which is, among other things, 'an initiative to find ways of grafting the new on the old' (72). Since this implies 'multiculturalism' and its influence on social, economic, and political factors, it is interesting to study Ricoeur's insight vis-à-vis Swamiji's, as also Gandhi's and others'. 'They will be relevant,' says the author, 'in attempts to strengthen human rights and to institute more effective social justice in modern India' (123).

Swamiji also revitalized the concept of *lokasamgraha*, says Tilak: 'Modern interpreters of the Gita

from Vivekananda to Tilak to Gandhi and Vinoba have identified and emphasized, each in his unique way, the connection between the traditional dharma of righteous behaviour and the modern ideal of public and social good (*lokasamgraha*)' (210). For this 'they carefully isolated and struggled to create new sets of cultural meanings out of the old ones already constituted in traditional symbols and myths. Their new utopian visions or dreams contested the socio-political situation of their times and sought to conceive a revolutionized future' (234), though, its realization was 'often frustrated'.

But Swami Vivekananda's plan had one distinct feature, as noted by the professor: 'His understanding of the poor and the problem of poverty and its potential solution was informed by a long tradition of the actual lived experience of poverty by the people of India' (248). Moreover, Swamiji's inspiration for social activism crystallized around the nucleus of his perception 'Daridranarayana', God the poor. This is a unique hermeneutical strategy. Thus, Swamiji was 'the first important thinker in modern Indic history to posit a direct correlation between religion and the welfare of the poor' (249). The hermeneutics reinterpreted 'three particular acts of dharma as being conducive to public good: *yajna*, *dana*, and *tapas/dama*' (210).

This is described by Tilak as 'the liberative hermeneutics of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Vinoba'. They 'include (i) commitment to eradicate poverty; (ii) affirmation that reality is one and liberation (whether pragmatic or transcendent) is an all-encompassing phenomenon; (iii) privileging the poor as a significant hermeneutical category and making the poor a favoured exegetical concern; (iv) rejection of the idea of a neutral reading of the text'. In short, this kind of interpretation demands that 'an interpreter must opt for a particular stance or position openly and unapologetically'. In this case, Swami Vivekananda, 'consciously sides with the poor and Indian religious texts are read from that perspective' (232).

Extending this view, the professor says that the hermeneutics 'may be stated as follows: from the poor to God and from God back to the poor. More

specifically, Narayana must be seen in the determinate context of the subaltern—the ritually, socially and economically poor and oppressed people of India.' In short, Narayana and his consort Lakshmi now represent 'a primordial hermeneutical circle' (249).

This is 'Sevayoga' and 'Vivekananda was its first modern propounder' (250). Expanding on the teaching of 'oneness of all' in the Gita and the Upanishads, Swamiji 'provided a broader basis for service of one's fellow beings that was quite distinct from that which existed in the traditional virtues of giving (*dana*) and compassion (*daya karuna*)' (260). In short, this is, in Swamiji's own words, 'Narayana, the God of the poor, is the God of the Samhitas, Brahmanas, Upanishads, Puranas and the Bhagvadgita' (251). This made Swamiji see 'socialism as a global phenomenon [and he] tied its fate with the advent of subaltern or proletariat rule all over the world' (252). And this he said was 'a rallying point to fight oppression' (257).

Finally, Tilak makes another important point clear: 'The idea that one so scholastic and used to moving in elite circles could be so perceptive, as to understand the life of poverty around him was unusual' (257). There is, I suppose, nothing unusual in this. For Swamiji, Brahman in everything is an experience and not a mere hermeneutical tool for understanding and deconstructing texts. This is what I believe. Whether one agrees wholly or not with Tilak, here are very crucial insights which need further study and careful absorption into the extant dynamics of seva as worship. 

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3. Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1993), 30 (photo).
4. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Interfaith Theology, A Reader* (New Delhi: Viva, 2007), 20.

5. Shrinivas Tilak, *Understanding Karma: In Light of Paul Ricoeur's Philosophical Anthropology and Hermeneutics* (Nagpur/Bensalem: International Centre for Cultural Studies, 2006), blurb.

(Continued from page 193)

Out of the past the future must come and he [Swami Vivekananda] knew no greater and more permanent foundation for the future than a true knowledge of what had preceded before. The present is the effect of the infinity of causes which represent the past. They had many things to learn from the Europeans but their past, the glory of India which had passed away, should constitute even a still greater source of inspiration and instruction. Things rise and things decay, there is rise and fall everywhere in the world. And though India is fallen to-day she will assuredly rise again (loud cheers). There was a time when India produced great philosophers and still greater prophets and preachers. The memory of those days ought to fill them with hope and confidence. This was not the first time in the history of India that they were so low. Periods of depression and degradation had occurred before this but India has always triumphed in the long run and so would she once again in the future (254).

Perhaps this was the reason why Swamiji was present at that banquet: to reassure the small number of Indians gathered that evening that India had had a glorious past and that a bright future awaited her. 

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2. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), 4.142.
3. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumar\\_Shri\\_Ranjitsinhji](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumar_Shri_Ranjitsinhji)> accessed 8 December 2008.
4. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha* (Calcutta: Mandal Book House, 1383 BE), 2.57.
5. See Sankari Prasad Basu, *Nivedita Lokamata*, 4 vols (Calcutta: Ananda, 1375 BE), 1.573.
6. See *Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers* (1893-1902), ed. Sankari Prasad Basu and Sunil Bihari Ghosh (Calcutta: Basu and Bhattacharyya, 1969), 252-4.

# Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(Continued from the December 2008 issue)

## 34. *Tasyāḥ sādhanāni gāyantyācāryāḥ.*

*The means to this realization [of bhakti] have been praised in song by the teachers.*

**N**ARADA has described the fundamentals of ideal bhakti and also the characteristics of an ideal sadhaka. How can we become an ideal sadhaka? This is taken up next by Narada.

*Ācāryāḥ*, teachers: All realized souls have sung about the means of bhakti. *Gāyanti* refers to the fact that they have given spontaneous expression to their realization. They are the authorities and we must have faith in them.

## 35. *Tat tu viṣaya-tyāgāt saṅga-tyāgāt ca.*

*That can be achieved by giving up sense objects and evil company.*

If a sadhaka knows the obstacles, he will avoid them and go on the right path. Hence Narada takes up the obstacles and deals with the negative aspect first. The first condition is renunciation of sense objects and attachments. ‘Objects’ not only means material objects but also men, women, name and fame, reputation, power, and the like—all objects that are pulling you outwards and away from God. And your attachment is the dragging force. Feel these obstacles; then you will make real attempts to overcome them.

Only leaving objects alone will not do. Your consciousness still responds to such ideas as ‘father’ and ‘mother’. Then, give up such consciousness altogether. Attachment remains dormant but comes

up under certain circumstances. Therefore, giving up attachment means giving up completely the consciousness of the reality of the objective world. Dream objects do not attract us in the waking state because we know they are not real. The sadhaka can renounce objects and attachments only through *vairāgya*, renunciation. So Narada adds *saṅga-tyāga*: not only the outer relationship with objects, but also the mental relation with them. By *vairāgya* he means ‘considering objects as unreal’. If you have this, the subject-object pull will gradually subside. When the outward distractions subside, there will be a dynamic inward pull along with a feeling of divine joy. This is called *kuṇḍalinī jāgarana*, awakening of the kundalini, which ultimately leads to samadhi.

## 36. *Avyāvṛtta bhajanāt.*

*By uninterrupted service and meditation.*

You can’t fully give up by only saying ‘I will give up’, unless you also try to identify more and more with God. Constructive sadhana—japa, dhyana, study, and the like—leading to the consciousness of identification with God will help your ‘negative sadhana’. Only if you ‘catch’ God can you give up the world and attachment to it. Both forms of sadhana are interdependent. Negative sadhana will be successful only through positive sadhana. Japa, dhyana, and study bring about a meditative consciousness. This is mentioned by Narada as bhajana. If bhajana, or devotional singing and study, does not bring about this meditative consciousness and is done only for pleasure, then it is not sadhana at all.

How is it possible to do this uninterrupted? One must not remain idle and keep the mind empty at other times. You may not be meditating in the technical sense, but you can have meditative

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The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda’s classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

consciousness throughout your life. Mahapurush Maharaj [Swami Shivananda] said, 'When meditation becomes natural, then it develops into meditative consciousness.' Then it remains uninterrupted. This is called *smarana-manana*.

So have a meditative attitude. Your life is guided by your attitude. If your attitude is secular, you will sleep during meditation and talk of worldly matters. If you have a meditative attitude, real spiritual attitude, you will have uninterrupted meditation, even though you may not be meditating technically.

### 37. *Loke'pi bhagavad-guṇa-śravaṇa-kīrtanāt.*

*Even while living in the world, by hearing and singing the Lord's glories.*

Narada is practical. He knows that you may have to perform secular activities and may feel, 'How can I keep up this uninterrupted spiritual attitude?' You may give it up. But Narada advises you not to give up. Spiritualize all your so-called secular activities. This is real practicality. If you have developed a spiritual attitude then all your activities will automatically be spiritualized. Your talks will also be spiritualized. You may start talking about money, but if your attitude is spiritual, your talk will automatically turn into spiritual talk. *Śravaṇa-kīrtana* does not mean mere devotional singing or kirtana, but spiritualization of talk and other activities.

### 38. *Mukhyatastu mahat-kṛpayaiva bhagavat-kṛpā-leśād-vā.*

*But primarily through the grace of great souls, or through a little of divine grace.*

*Mukhyataḥ* means primarily: that without which no negative or positive sadhana will be true sadhana. Realize the grace of the guru and the *mahapurushas*, great souls, otherwise egotism will attack you. Even though you may be sincere, within all your positive and negative sadhana the ego is lurking.

*Guru-kṛpā*, grace of the guru, and the grace of great souls are forms of *bhagavad-kṛpā*, God's grace. *Brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati*, the knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. God's grace is infinite and may come through happiness or misery, or through

the medium of the guru or great souls. If you get this *kṛpā* your life will be transformed and your sadhana will become real sadhana.

*Kṛpā* cannot be earned by flattery. If you sincerely try to attune your life with the ideal, then the attunement of the great souls with your absolute Reality, which is ever existent, will automatically begin to have a dynamic effect on you—this is *mahat-kṛpā*. To realize this *kṛpā* means to see all your activities and sadhanas as the *kṛpā* of the guru and great souls. This is the *mukhya* or real attitude of a true devotee. Such a devotee will never become egotistic.

*(To be continued)*

*(Continued from page 199)*

4. These two American ladies stood by Vivekananda ever since they came in contact with him in the US, and helped the Ramakrishna Order in numerous ways even after Vivekananda's death.
5. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 5 vols (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2006), 1.330–33.
6. See Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1999), 77: 'The lecture on "Kali" at the Albert Hall was fixed for Monday, February 13, 1899. Nivedita worked assiduously to collect material on the subject. After preparing the lecture she showed it to Swami [Vivekananda] who approved of it.'
7. Soon after its inauguration on 13 November 1898, Nivedita's school was in the throes of a financial crisis. In order to collect funds for the school, Nivedita left for a tour of the West in the summer of 1899 in the company of Swami Vivekananda.
8. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 1.194.
9. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7.200–1.
10. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.43.
11. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 1.38.
12. Ibid., 1.456–7. Nivedita firmly held the view that the people had to be awakened to direct their dormant powers to the desired end. She saw such dormant powers in the decoration of a shawl, in the silvery border of a sari, in the shape of a pot as also in the decorative art of an Indian painting. She saw in all these the hidden strength of the nation. Such potential strength had to be harnessed in the times ahead, she said, making India a nation of immense greatness.
13. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, 2.550.
14. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, 3.21.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## ***A Monk for All Seasons***

Elva Linnea Nelson

Llumina Press, PO Box 772246, Coral Springs, FL 33077-2246, USA. Website: [www.llumina.com](http://www.llumina.com). 2007. xvi + 307 pp. \$17.95.

The appearance of an increasing number of biographies of its pioneering swamis in the United States constitutes a very significant development in the world of Ramakrishna-Vedanta today. To my limited knowledge, we have, *A Bridge of Dreams*—the life of Paramananda—by Sara Ann Levinsky (West Stockbridge: Lindisfarne, 1984), *A Heart Poured Out: A Story of Swami Ashokananda* by Sister Gargi (New York: Kalpa Tree, 2003), and now *A Monk for All Seasons: Akhilananda, His Life of Love and Service*. Besides, we have Swami Yogeshananda's classic *Six Lighted Windows: Memories of Swamis in the West*. We also continue to get reminiscences of such other swamis as Pavitrananda and Ritajananda in *American Vedantist*.

It is to this genre that Elva Nelson's book belongs. My impressions of Akhilananda are confined only to two of his books: *Mental Health and Hindu Psychology* and *A Hindu View of Christ*. The impressions I gathered then were minuscule. Reading this book reveals his incredible range and versatility, which touched and transformed not only intellectuals and individual seekers but the very processes by which the subtle spiritual forces—with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda as the nuclei—work on a global scale. This is of particular significance in the face of the fact that when Akhilananda entered America it was 'rolling in affluence, awash in a tide of new mores'; in short, 'it was the age of the flapper and jazz music' as Elva Nelson describes it—the age of, one may say, Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. And, of course, the Great Market Crash of 1929 followed.

Akhilananda offered antidotes, several shock absorbers, to the resultant crisis—antidotes which tamed but did not terminate America's amazing in-

tellectual vigour and vitality in various fields. This saga is told in this absorbing narrative. In fact, and in the main, this is not only Akhilananda's story but also the story of enrichment of several fields of intra-cultural significance. For instance, as the author notes: he 'felt strongly that a new kind of psychology was needed' to offer correctives to 'the narrow views and concepts of some of the then present day psychologists such as the behaviorists and dogmatic psychoanalysts' (77). According to Akhilananda: 'If we want to develop a complete psychology, we have to discipline ourselves first. ... Until you can discipline your mind, and train yourself wholly and completely, you have no access to the mystic experiences of the superconscious realm. Until you take up the methods that will lead you to mystic realization, you have not the slightest idea of the existence of the superconscious realization, nor of its effects' (ibid).

Consisting of twenty-three chapters, the volume opens with the story of the swami's birth, childhood, and youth and takes us through to his last years. Three chapters—six to eight—are devoted to his ministry in Providence, where a Vedanta centre was founded by him. In the chapter entitled 'The Temple' we get a moving account of his being instrumental in obtaining funds for the Ramakrishna temple at Belur Math, for which purpose—according to a cable from Swami Shivananda, the then president of the Order—Sri Ramakrishna 'had sent him [Akhilananda] to America' (58).

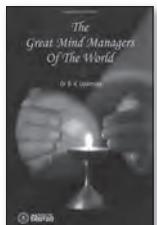
This is only one instance of the kind of impact the swami had on almost all those who came into contact with him. Through his selfless love and empathy towards everyone, he won the hearts of people. To mention just one instance, Dr Richard Evans, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in New York City, while speaking about Akhilananda in the course of a lecture, called him 'the most Christ-like man he had ever met' (140).

In this volume we come across some of the swami's words which seem tailor-made as correctives to the terrorist/fundamentalist excesses that have become an inseparable part of life all over the world today.

The author describes how he provided succour to the mentally deranged and brought new hope into their lives. This and many other little-known aspects of the swami's personality highlighted here make it an interesting volume. But for the typos, the book is excellently produced, with many rare photographs—including the portrait of the swami on the cover, which shows his compassionate eyes in a face shining brilliantly with the expression of total commitment to and conviction about his chosen cause. Not only are such lives worth reading about, but they are also worth emulating.

*Dr M Sivaramkrishna*

Former Head, Department of English  
Osmania University, Hyderabad



### ***The Great Mind Managers of the World***

**Dr B K Upadhyay**

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, K M Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: [brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in](mailto:brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in). 2007. xviii + 288 pp. Rs 250.

**T**he author of this book is a police officer residing at Nagpur. His background of doctoral studies in Sanskrit has stood him in good stead in pursuing the study of Indian culture. This book is based on an earlier publication of his in English on mind management. It is a study of the lives and teachings of exemplary individuals as mind managers.

The author's choice of exemplars is interesting. All of them are well-known personalities in world history, whose achievements have been extensively studied, appreciated, and critiqued: Sri Krishna, Buddha, Mahavira, Jesus Christ, Prophet Muhammad, Swami Vivekananda, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Mahatma Gandhi, and Babasaheb Ambedkar. They represent a cross-section of human society, ranging from founders of religions to political and scientific figures.

The book begins with a chapter on the technique of mind management or self-management. It is obvious that unless one knows how to manage one's own life, there is no question of trying to help others. This is a constant refrain in Vedic literature. The rishis of ancient times first realized their own nature and then taught others. According to this book, modern psychotherapists have failed to note this point. They would do well to remember the biblical warning: 'Physician, heal thyself.'

Each of the ten chapters that follow is dedicated

to one 'case study'—a brief life sketch followed by an analysis of the personage's teachings and contributions. Apart from Sri Krishna—whose life is shrouded in antiquity—all the personalities have been subjects of modern historical studies and the author has succeeded well in analysing their thought processes.

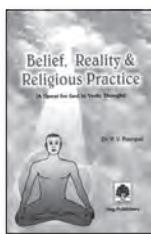
It is only with respect to Jesus Christ that Upadhyay seems to have followed the traditional approach of the Christian Church. He ignores modern critical researches into the origins of Christianity and the real character of Jesus. The findings in the Naj Hammadi Library, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other documents have tried to demystify Jesus's personality and have presented him in a more human light as a historical personality. A perusal of this literature shows that Jesus was even a better mind manager than what the Bible presents him to be.

The chapter on Einstein repeats the cliché, beaten to death by now, about the relativity of time, contrasting usual time with that which you spend with a nice girl or by a warm fire in winter! Poor Einstein! Like many other famous personalities, he also has had his share of misquotes. Relativity of space and time is a much more serious and complicated affair than that.

These drawbacks notwithstanding, all the chapters are well-written and informative. The author has an easy style that makes for smooth reading. The book should especially interest the youth.

*Dr N V C Swamy*

Dean of Academic Programmes  
Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana  
Bangalore



### ***Belief, Reality & Religious Practice***

**Dr VV Rampal**

Nag Publishers, 11 A/U A Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. 2007. xxiv + 312 pp. Rs 350

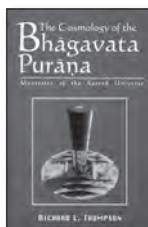
**T**his book is an attempt to bridge the divide between religion and science. People from both camps have been trying to understand *sat*, reality, in their respective domains. Scientists have marshalled such resources as mathematics and related logical and theoretical structures, experiments in laboratories as well as thought experiments, supercomputers for analysing huge volumes of data, and information technology for rapid dissemination of critical knowledge. Religionists,

at least in India, have experimented with the mind, through yoga, philosophical analysis, mythology, and spiritual disciplines or tapas of various kinds. Yet the views on reality of both these camps have been so divergent that they have been in disagreement for centuries now. Disagreement, of course, is rooted in the beliefs we have in our brains.

Dr Rampal, though trained as a scientist, veered towards the study of Vedic spirituality through study, enquiry, and sadhana, as is often the case in India. This book reflects his familiarity with both science and religion—the book is subtitled ‘A quest for God in Vedic Thought’. The author has tried to reconcile some time-tested beliefs—that have gone into the making of society for thousands of years and which now seem to be outdated—with modern beliefs. The glamour of science and technology, training its multi-hued beam of pseudo-imperatives on ancient beliefs and customs, often gives the illusion of unreality to the latter. The author has researched the essentials of ancient values and also acknowledged the beneficial side of the modern world view.

Our beliefs about reality may not be as accurate as we often imagine them to be. Many a times, the reality is different from beliefs. This applies to both scientists and religious people. Both have had their original experimenters and both invite people to duplicate the original experiments. Yet the majority of people in both camps have doctrinaire attitudes and neither question nor practise what they believe. This outlook, though comfortable, is actually dangerous. Thus the phrase ‘religious practice’ in the title assumes special importance. This book should make the reader pause and analyse both ancient and modern beliefs.

Swami Satyamayananda  
Acharya, Probationers’ Training Centre, Belur Math



### ***The Cosmology of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa***

Richard L Thompson

Motilal Banarsi das, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 2007. x + 361 pp. Rs 495.

The Bhagavata, a principal text of the Indian spiritual tradition, has inspired many a seeker after Truth, allowing itself to be interpreted according to both the dualistic and non-dualistic schools of philosophy. But that this Purana carries within it an earth-centred conception of the cosmos, which

is logical and expressible in modern mathematical terminology is new information, the credit for which has to go to Richard Thompson. His ability to read through the esoteric texts and bring out a coherent explanation is commendable. Using modern astronomy as a reference frame, he expounds the meaning of various Indian texts. He argues in this work that Jambudvipa of the Puranas may be understood as a planisphere model of the earth—the idea of the earth as a globe was well-established in India by the time this Purana came to be written. The *bhu-mandala* geography, he declares, encodes a combination of astronomical and geographical maps which is both rational and scientific. With suitably constructed maps, figures, and geometrical drawings, the difficult subject reads like a story.

A 360-day year is found in many ancient cultures suggesting either common cultural roots or extensive communication between cultures. But the Indians were well ahead of many other civilizations in astronomy. All the same it would be naïve to assume that the world view of a Puranic text would correspond to the modern view of the universe. Thompson does not feel that this detracts from the value of the Bhagavata world view. He declares: ‘Of the Indian astronomers, Aryabhata was exceptional in that he taught that day and night are due to the rotation of the earth on its axis! The *Bhagavatam* approximates the orbit period of Jupiter and Saturn within 0.3% and 0.004% respectively! Taken literally, the cosmology of the *Bhagavatam* differs radically from modern astronomy, and it also suffers from internal contradictions and violations of common sense. However, these very contradictions point the way to a different understanding of *Bhagavata* cosmology in which it emerges as a deep and scientifically sophisticated system of thought. Study of the contradictions shows that they are caused by overlapping self-consistent interpretations that use the same textual elements to expound different ideas.’

A reasonable grounding in modern mathematics, cosmology, and astronomy, as well as in Sanskrit and Puranic studies is a necessary prerequisite to appreciating this book. Above all, it calls for a fresh and daring approach. Students of science would do well to study this book and get acquainted with the heights to which Puranic thinkers ascended merely through intense concentration and deep faith in a living cosmos. The publishers deserve thanks for the elegant get-up.

Swami Atmajnananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

# REPORTS

## Relief

**Flood Relief** · Torrential rains caused havoc in the Santa Catarina state of **Brazil** in November 2008, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless and more than 1.5 million affected in several cities and their suburbs. **São Paulo** centre started relief services to flood victims through two of its sub-centres: **Curitiba** sub-centre provided 200 family kits containing essential items (pants, shirts, T-shirts, coats, sweaters, towels, bed-sheets, socks, shoes, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and soap), 250 l milk, various food items (bread, biscuits, sweets, and pasta), drinking water, 10 kg soap powder, and 50 l disinfectant; **Rio de Janeiro** sub-centre provided 3 cars full of various essential items (drinking water bottles, eatables, and clothes). In **India**—on 27 November 2008 the cyclone Nisha caused heavy rainfall in Tamil Nadu, followed by breach of river embankments and severe flood—the worst in the last 25 years. **Chennai Math** immediately started relief operations among flood victims distributing 10,000 kg rice, 1,000 blankets, 1,000 mats, 1,000 saris, 1,000 dhotis, 3,000 children's garments, 1,000 bags, and 1,000 towels to 1,000 flood-affected families belonging to 12 villages of Thanjavur and Tiruvarur districts. During the months of November and December, four centres continued their post-flood relief activities. **Patna** centre distributed 275 kg chhatu, 23 kg biscuits, 239 kg milk powder, 15,000 saris, 5,000 dhotis, 8,000 lungis, 204 shirts, 15,000 assorted garments, 39,400 blankets, 29,470 mats, 9,540 buckets, 37,950 steel plates, 20,000 steel tumblers, 17,950 steel mugs, 10,000 steel bowls, 17,950 steel spoons, 3,590 steel ladles, 7,180 aluminium pots, and 3,590 knives to 21,772 flood-affected families belonging to 131 vil-



*Flood Relief by Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, São Paulo, in the Santa Catarina State of Brazil*

lages of Madhepura and Saharsa districts. **Bhubaneswar**

centre gave 2,425 school bags, 4,850 notebooks, 4,850 pens, and other study material to 2,425 flood-affected students of 10 schools in Cuttack and Puri districts. **Puri Mission** offered 2,000 blankets to as many flood-affected families belonging to 56 villages of Gop, Deulanga, and Kanas blocks in Puri district. **Belgharia** centre provided 4,089 saris, 4,073 dhotis, and 5,116 blankets to 5,116 families belonging to 125 villages of Dantan II, Narayangarh, Sabang, and Patashpur blocks in Paschim Medinipur and Purba Medinipur.

**Winter Relief** · 3,186 blankets were distributed to needy people through the following centres: **Belgaum**, 200; **Chandigarh**, 326; **Jalpaiguri**, 200; **Karimganj**, 500; **Manasadwip**, 100; **Puri Mission**, 1,260; **Sargachhi**, 600. Besides, **Vrindaban** centre distributed 1,000 shawls to widows.

**Distress Relief** · The following centres provided various items to needy people in their respective areas: **Belgaum**: 375 kg rice, 375 kg flour, 75 kg pulses, 75 kg edible oil, and 200 saris; **Jalpaiguri**: 450 saris and 213 children's garments; **Sargachhi**: 160 saris; **Vrindaban**: 1,000 dhotis, 2,000 soap bars, and 100 l oil.

**Disturbance Relief** · **Itanagar** centre distributed 2,180 blankets to 1,410 families affected by the recent social turmoil in 29 villages of Darrang and Udalguri districts of Assam.



## *Synopsis of the Ramakrishna Mission Governing Body's Report for 2007-08*

The 99th Annual General Meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission was held at Belur Math on Sunday, 7 December 2008, at 3.30 p.m.

During the year under review the Mission started a new centre at Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir.

In the educational field, the following new

projects deserve special mention: starting of a new Faculty of General and Adapted Physical Education and Yoga by Vivekananda University at its faculty centre at Coimbatore; an Audio Book Studio for publication of books on CD by the Blind Boys' Academy of Narendrapur centre; a CNC

(Computerized Numerical Control) Training Centre at Coimbatore centre; two bridge courses for non-science students to get pre-requisite knowledge in science for joining Vivekananda University's five-year integrated MSc course in Integrated Rural and Tribal Development in Ranchi (Morabadi), and completing the construction for the following buildings: a hostel building for orphan and destitute boys at Port Blair, a students' home at Kadapa, and school buildings at Vijayawada, Chennai (Vidyapith), Malda, Jayrambati, and Raraha centres.

In the medical field, the following new projects deserve special mention: starting of two courses, viz. Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPT) and Bachelor of Optometry (BOptom) at Seva Pratishthan centre; a 13-bed Nephrology unit, a Cardiac Catheterization Lab and a Virtual Museum of Pathology in Lucknow Sevashrama; a Low-vision Centre and Clinic at the Blind Boys' Academy of Narendrapur centre; a charitable eye clinic at Belgaum centre and completing the construction of a seven-storied extension building at Seva Pratishthan, a 10-bed hospital for hostel students at Aalo centre, and a three-storied building for the attendants and relatives of patients at Kankhal Sevashrama.

In the rural development field, the following new projects deserve special mention: starting of 14 village resource centres under VIVEKDISHA project by Vivekananda University for providing such services as telemedicine and tele-education; a number of programmes such as biotechnology programme, wasteland development programme, restoration of biodiversity through plantation of lac host plant, school sanitation and hygiene education by the Lokasiksha Parishad of Narendrapur centre; a free hostel for high school students of rural areas at Kadapa centre, four non-formal schools at nearby villages by Aalo centre, and village development programmes like medicinal plant cultivation and integrated watershed development programme by Ranchi (Morabadi) centre.

Under the Ramakrishna Math, the following new developments deserve special mention: start-

ing of a new centre at Bagda in West Bengal; an institute of languages at Rajkot centre; a newly built four-storied dispensary and construction of 70 toilets in a village of Bangalore Urban district by Ulsoor centre (Bangalore), and inauguration of a three-storied extension to the school building at Kalady centre.

Outside India, the Mission started a new centre at Comilla in Bangladesh. Durban centre in South Africa started a large clinic, a relief centre for distraught women, a family welfare centre for providing cooked meals, and a home for terminally ill patients. Sylhet centre in Bangladesh started three computer training courses, affiliated to the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB).

During the year the Math and Mission undertook extensive relief and rehabilitation programmes in several parts of the country involving an expenditure of Rs 3.97 crore, benefiting 18.39 lakh people belonging to 4.39 lakh families in 2,975 villages.

Welfare work was done by way of providing scholarships to poor students, pecuniary help to old, sick and destitute people, and the like; the expenditure incurred was Rs 7.08 crore.

Medical service was rendered to more than 76.67 lakh people through 15 hospitals, 123 dispensaries and 53 mobile medical units; the expenditure incurred was Rs 69.44 crore.

Nearly 4.05 lakh students were studying in our educational institutions from kindergarten to university level. A sum of Rs 126.72 crore was spent on educational work.

A number of rural and tribal development projects were undertaken with a total expenditure of Rs 23.01 crore.

We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to our members and friends for their kind co-operation and help.

Swami Prabhananda  
General Secretary  
Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission

**Correction** · December 2008, p. 644: For 'jigirshu' read 'jijivishu'.